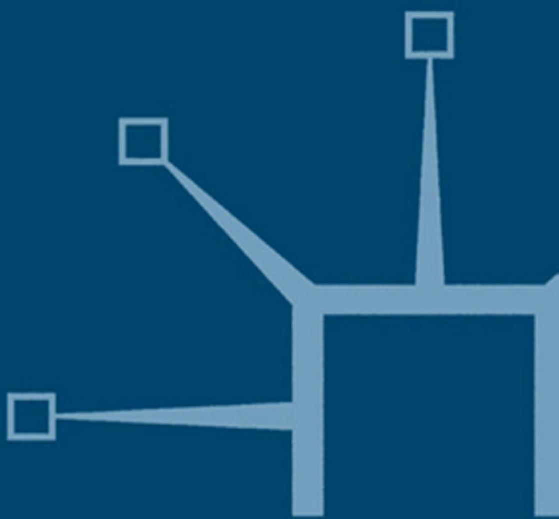
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The Concept of Universal Religion in Modern Hindu Thought

Arvind Sharma



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First published in Great Britain 1998 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and London
Companies and representatives throughout the world

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0–333–72584–0



First published in the United States of America 1998 by
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
Scholarly and Reference Division,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 0–312–21647–5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sharma, Arvind.
The concept of universal religion in modern Hindu thought / Arvind Sharma.
p. cm. — (Library of philosophy and religion)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–312–21647–5 (hardcover)
1. Hinduism—History—20th century. 2. Hinduism—Relations.
3. Religions (Proposed, universal, etc.) I. Title. II. Series:
Library of philosophy and religion (St. Martin's Press)
BL1151.3.S53 1998
294.5'2—dc21 98–22843
CIP

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

For
Ninian Smart

Contents

1

Universal Religion: What Does it Mean?

The concept of universal religion has been much in vogue in recent times.[1] In fact it has been used so often and in such diverse contexts that one begins to wonder whether it means the same thing all the time, or different things at different times. What follows is an attempt to determine its various usages and the intellectual roots of these usages.

One can approach the question from several points of view. These may be classified, for convenience, at the very outset, as (1) the philosophical approach; (2) the History of Religions approach; (3) the definitional approach; (4) the denominational approach; (5) the missiological approach; and (6) the dialogical approach. The meaning of these descriptions should become clear as the discussion progresses.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

The philosophical approach to the question of universal religion naturally turns on the nature of the universal – a matter of considerable philosophical debate.[2] At least three positions can be distinguished on the issue, particularly on the relation of the universal to the particulars: (1) nominalism; (2) conceptualism; and (3) realism. According to the nominalist position, the 'existence of a general word does not imply the existence of a general thing named by it'. Thus the fact that religion as a general word is used for particular religions does not mean that a universal or general entity like religion exists. On this view there would not only be no universal religion, but no 'religion', apart from the particular religions. Conceptualism holds that we do have concepts or general ideas which are both abstract as well as abstracted; abstracted, that is, as the common element from the particulars of a given class. On this view one could legitimately, if not concretely, talk about both religion as a general word and universal religion as that general property which each individual religion

possesses, by virtue of which the same general word is applied to them. According to the realist position, the universals definitely exist, an issue with which the conceptualist is not particularly concerned. They could, however, exist either as separate entities (the Platonic version) or 'not separately from particulars but in them' (the Aristotelian version). On this view, then, one could postulate a universal religion existing apart from the particular religions, which would then be mere imperfect reflections of it by Platonic extrapolation; or alternatively, by an Aristotelian extrapolation, one could speak of a universal element existing in all the particular religions.

It is a point worth noting that all of these three positions on universals – the nominalistic, the conceptualistic and the realistic – have parallels in ancient Indian thought[3] and that views regarding the nature of universal religion also seem to correspond to the philosophical standpoints outlined above. Thus, for instance, Santayana's comparison of 'any attempt to speak without speaking any particular language' with 'the attempt to have a religion that shall be no religion in particular', seems to imply a nominalistic position on the question of universal religion;[4] attempts to frame definitions of religion are often conceptualistic in nature,[5] while some religious figures like Mahatma Gandhi seem to take a realistic view of the universal religion more in the manner of Plato[6] ('extreme realism') and others like Rammohun Roy more in the manner of Aristotle[7] ('moderate realism').[8] It may also be added that the relationship between the 'particular' and 'universal' could also be viewed integrally,[9] rather than primarily from the point of view of the universal.

THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS APPROACH

Just as the key concept to be considered when the matter is approached philosophically is the universal, the key concept involved when the History of Religions approach is adopted is that of the archetype. The transition from the previous section to this may be accomplished by moving from the Augustinian idea that the Platonic forms were archetypes in the mind of God, to the Jungian idea that the archetypes exist in the mind (collective unconscious) of human beings rather than in the mind of God. If an archetype is described as 'a primordial image, character or pattern that recurs through the religious experience of mankind consistently enough to be considered a

universal concept of the situation', then its relevance to the present discussion is obvious and immediately raises two issues: (1) if the archetypes are universal, and if archetypes are to be associated with religion, then is not religion universal? and (2) is 'universal religion' an archetype?

The latter question does not seem to have been investigated hitherto and the former question only partially. The role of archetypes in depth-psychology, literature,[10] and the study of religion[11] has been fairly well recognized, but the question: does the existence of archetypes make religion a universal phenomenon has not yet, it would appear, been explored, and if so, only indirectly. The work of Mircea Eliade sheds some light on the issue. Joseph D. Bettis[12] demonstrates how the Eliadean view of religion could be connected with the discussion of the universals, inasmuch as both deal with the role of trans-experiential factors in human life. 'What we experience is a product of the data in our environment and the images, models, ideas, and expectations we bring to it. These trans-experiential factors may come from a number of places and function in a variety of ways, but when they have a significant influence in shaping our fundamental world-view of life style, they become religious. Religious symbols and images provide the fundamental archetypes or paradigmatic models for organizing and shaping the religious man's environment.' This constitutes the sacred world-view as distinct from the profane.[13] But as Eliade also points out, modern man lives in a 'desacralized universe.' Whereas 'all societies with the exception of modern western civilization have recognized these two dimensions',[14] the sacred and the profane,[15] of relating to the environment, modern man 'lives in a one-dimensional profane world'.[16]

Does this mean that in modern times religion has ceased to be universal, in the sense that the fundamental archetypes provided by religious symbols and images have ceased to have influence? The fact that religion, in this sense, may have ceased to be universal does not necessarily mean that no universal religion is possible, if we restrict our universe of discourse only to the 'sacred'. We can then maintain that, within this universe, certain archetypal symbols and images are universal, and therefore religion is universal, and because religion in this sense is universal at that level of depth-psychology, we have a universal religion. If we further argue that these very symbols and images in their secularized version still continue to move secular human beings, then a case for 'religion' being universal, literally, in this attenuated sense, without it being restricted to the sacred, could also be made.

THE DEFINITIONAL APPROACH

In order to see how the definitions of religion can be brought to bear on the issue at hand, some preliminary remarks need to be made. Several attempts have been made to define religion and a survey classifies these definitions into three types: the theocentric, the sacracentric and the ultimocentric.[17] The theocentric definitions of religion define religion in terms of belief in a God or a high God. The sacracentric definitions define religion in terms of what is regarded as sacred or holy. The ultimocentric definitions define religion in terms of ultimate concern.

The theocentric definition has a rather limited application in the context of comparative religion and the sacracentric and ultimocentric have been used more often. When it comes to defining religion, however, a basic issue emerges: is religion to be defined in terms of the subject-matter of religion or in terms of the structure of religious phenomenology? Thus, for instance, if religion is defined in terms of God, then the phenomenon of communism, for instance, will fall outside the scope of the study. But if religion is not defined substantively but functionally then communism can be viewed as a religion, in the sense that it functions as a religion. It will thus be included in the study of religion. At the moment, the issue of the definition of religion has reached an impasse on this point. The implication this impasse has for the question of universal religion becomes clear from the following consideration:

> Most functional definitions of religion are essentially a sub-class of real definitions in which functional variables (the promotion of solidarity, and the like) are stipulated as the essential nature of religion. But whether the essential nature consists of a qualitative variable (such as 'the sacred') or a functional variable (such as social solidarity), it is virtually impossible to set any substantive boundary to religion, and, thus, to distinguish it from other sociocultural phenomena. Social solidarity, anxiety reduction, confidence in unpredictable situations, and the like, are functions which may be served by any or all cultural phenomena – Communism and Catholicism, monotheism and monogamy, images and imperialism – and unless religion is defined substantively, it would be impossible to delineate its boundaries. Indeed, even when its substantive boundaries are limited, some functional definitions impute to religion some of the functions of a total socio-cultural system.[18]

In other words, religion is more likely to be a universal phenomenon if defined functionally rather than substantively. Although religion then tends to become universal, the concept of universal religion becomes harder to apply, as a great many 'religions' and 'alternatives to religion' can be seen as performing the same function.

THE MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH

In a lecture delivered on December 3, 1873 at Westminster Abbey, F. Max Müller classified the religions of the world into two categories: the Non-missionary religions and the Missionary religions.[19] Then he proceeded to place Judaism, Brahmanism (or Hinduism) and Zoroastrianism in the former category and Buddhism, Mohammedanism (or Islam) and Christianity in the latter.[20] He went on to prophesy that the non-missionary religions were dying or dead[21] and the 'three religions which are alive and between which the decisive battle for the dominion of the world will be fought' are Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

It is clear that, in such a missionary context, the words 'world religion' or 'universal religion' mean a religion which aims at extending its sway over the whole globe. In more recent studies, the terms ethnic and universal religions have replaced the terms non-missionary and missionary religions as used by Max Müller, although the distinction between the two – the ethnic and universal religion – is still drawn on the basis of the absence or presence of a missionary character. It is clear, therefore, that on a missiological approach, a universal religion is (a) one to which, in principle, anyone in the world can convert. By the same token it is also (b) a religion which aspires to convert everyone in the world.

Even from a missiological point of view, however, one must now take another look at the situation. The three religions of the world which were characterized as non-missionary by Max Müller and which are usually described as ethnic by modern scholars, namely, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism, have now started accepting converts. The conversion of such celebrities as Sammy Davis, Jr. and Elizabeth Taylor has no doubt a sensational side to it, but on sober reflection these cases do prove the point that it is possible to convert to Judaism, even though when one wishes to do so, a committee of Jews first tries to dissuade one from doing so. Cases of conversion to Zoroastrianism had been known to occur in pre-Khomeini Iran. I

have this on the authority of a well-known scholar of Zoroastrianism. And cases of conversion to Hinduism are so numerous that they need hardly be documented.

How, then, do these ethnic or non-missionary religions differ from the missionary or universal religions? In this, that the task of spreading the faith in them has not been raised to the level of religious duty and hence they do not proselytize. It must be borne in mind, however, that even if the ethnic religions do not aspire to spread all over the world, nevertheless, they now accept those who would join their ranks from all over the world. This development within the traditions has not been free from controversy but it must be recognized that it has occurred. On account of these developments, therefore, we must now distinguish between two uses of the word universal religion: (1) a religion which accepts converts from any part of the world; (2) a religion which seeks converts in every part of the world. One must now begin to carefully distinguish between these two meanings of the word universal religion.

THE DENOMINATIONAL APPROACH

Although the expression universal religion is a nebulous one, the word universalism is less so. It represents the belief that all souls will be saved and thus calls any doctrine of the elect into question. The word also helps in broadening and deepening the concept of universal religion. It broadens it by indicating that even within the Christian Church, normally considered exclusivist, the doctrine of universalism did make its appearance. Origen of Alexandria in the 3rd century is said to have taken such a position.[22] Closer to our own times, the Universalist and the Unitarian denominations of the American Protestant Church adopted a similar position, which may account in part for their merger in 1961 into the Unitarian-Universalist Association. Universalism also deepens our understanding of the concept of universal religion by associating the idea of belief in the salvation of all with it.

The beginnings of universalism in the United States are associated with the name of George De Benneville (1703–93) and its further growth and spread with the names of John Murray (1741–1815) and Hosea Ballou (1771–1852).[23] The universalism of the Universalists, however, continued to be centred on Christ, holding either that the wicked, after having suffered in hell will be saved by the atonement

of Christ, or, that the punishment in this life itself will suffice for that purpose and upon death the souls of the good and the wicked alike will enter a state of happiness.[24] The Unitarians, in this respect, took an even more universalistic position by maintaining 'that all religions, from Fetichism to the most perfect form of Christianity, are essentially of the same nature, being only developments, more or less perfect, of the religious sentiment which is common to all men' and by further maintaining that 'all men who have any religious thoughts or feelings are so inspired',[25] though there may be differences of degree.

Universalism as a religious doctrine, therefore, seems to contribute two nuances to the concept of universal religion: (1) that of universal salvation; and (2) that of universal religious inspiration.[26]

THE DIALOGICAL APPROACH

The existence of a religiously plural world, coupled with the fact that the followers of the different religious traditions have been forced into closer contact by modern technological developments, has generated much discussion on what the pattern of relationship among them ideally ought to be, on the one hand, and could realistically be expected to exist, on the other. Much of this discussion is carried on under the umbrella description of the dialogue of world religions. What light does this discussion shed on the concept of universal religion?

The expression universal religion in this case cuts in two directions, though more in one than the other. Universal religion is usually taken to refer to the concept of a single world religion. Sometimes, however, it is used to refer to the collective religious inheritance of humanity. The implications of the first sense may be examined first.

It has been suggested, for instance, that 'the whole trend of global life today is in the direction of a single world-religion' and that 'three ways of achieving this one religion have been conceived':[27] (a) 'The way of displacement' – that is to say, one existing religion displaces all other existing religions; (b) 'the way of synthesis' – that is to say, a new religion comes into being reflecting the best insights of all; and (c) 'the way of what is called "reconception"',[28] that is to say, each religion re-conceives itself upon encountering other religions by going back to its essentials and 'what will thus be found is a "way" to be found in all the great religions'.[29] The last view is associated with the name of Professor W.E. Hocking.[30] After a detailed discussion of these

possibilities, however, Professor Slater concludes that 'so far as the immediate vista is concerned', 'none of the three ways seems to promise the prospect of one world religion'.[31] He concludes that 'the prospect of one world–one religion' is 'a very remote prospect to say the least'.[32] He adds, however, 'but the prospect of one world is not remote',[33] and that the prospect on the religious scene is one of a 'pattern of coexistence' of the major religions of mankind.

This brings us to the second sense of the use of the expressions world-religion and universal religion in the plural, namely, 'world-religions' or 'universal religions'.[34] Such usage permits individual religions to be referred to as universal religions, not because they are professed by all the people of the globe, but because some people somewhere on the globe profess them. The shift in sense involved is rather sharp but an examination of the current usage of the term shows that it has already occurred. However, to rescue its use in this sense from being rather banal, the implication must be recognized that the separate existence of these individual religions serves a spiritual end. 'All the great world-religions may be regarded as universal in spirit. All these religions are universal by virtue of their appeal to the spirit of man. None of them is professed by all the men in the world. The universality of world-faiths consists in the provision they make for the perfection of man.'[35]

The following elements in the concept of universal religion can thus be identified on the basis of the survey carried out above.

On a philosophical approach it may imply:

(1) That there is no universal religion, only particular religions;
(2) That the generic idea of a universal religion may be abstracted from the individual religions;
(3) That a universal religion exists distinct and apart from the particular religions, which are only imperfect embodiments thereof;
(4) That a universal religion exists but only as the common element residing in the various particular religions.

A History of Religions approach further suggests:

(5) That the archetypes are the universal element in the universal religions, and
(6) That the 'idea' of a 'universal religion' may itself be an archetype.

A definitional approach suggests:

(7) That on a functional view, the concept of universal religion may mean that religion is a universal phenomenon.

The denominational approach suggests:

(8) That the content of universality in universal religion may consist of the doctrine that salvation is open to all, or/and
(9) That all religions are divinely inspired.

The missiological approach suggests that the concept of universal religion may further imply:

(10) That a religion aspires to become the one religion everyone in the world follows; or
(11) The people of the globe may follow any religion of their choice.

The dialogical approach suggests that the concept of universal religion may further imply:

(12) That everyone on the globe becomes the follower of a single religion, or
(13) That all the religions of the world provide for the perfectibility of human beings.[36]

We now proceed to examine the role the concept of universal religion has played in modern Hindu thought.

2

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Rammohun Roy (1772/4–1833)

I

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772/4–1833) has not only been hailed as the father of modern India[1] and as the first great modern Hindu,[2] but is also said to have been 'so much ahead of his time that he seriously contemplated a universal religion which would some day be accepted by the whole of mankind'.[3] It is with the last aspect of his life and thought that we are particularly concerned here.

II

It will be useful to begin with a survey of the Roy's contacts with the major religious traditions of humanity, for there seems to be little doubt that 'he had been brought by his pioneer studies in Comparative Religion to Universalism'.[4] One may begin first with his background. In an autobiographical letter to a friend, he described his ancestry and his early life until the age of sixteen as follows:

> My ancestors were Brahmins of a high order, and, from time immemorial, were devoted to the religious duties of their race, down to my fifth progenitor, who about one hundred and forty years ago gave up spiritual exercises for worldly pursuits and aggrandisement. His descendants ever since have followed his example, and according to the usual fate of courtiers, with various success, sometimes rising to honour and sometimes falling; sometimes rich and

sometimes poor; sometimes excelling in success, sometimes miserable through disappointment. But my maternal ancestors, being of the sacerdotal order by profession as well as by birth, and of a family than which none holds a higher rank in that profession, have up to the present day uniformly adhered to a life of religious observances and devotion, preferring peace and tranquillity of mind to the excitements of ambition, and all the allurements of worldly grandeur. In conformity with the usage of my paternal race, and the wish of my father, I studied the Persian and Arabic languages, – these being indispensable to those who attached themselves to the courts of the Mohammedan princes, and agreeably to the use of my maternal relations, I devoted myself to the study of the Sanscrit and the theological works written in it, which contain the body of Hindoo literature, law and religion.[5]

In considering the contribution of his background towards the growth of universalism in his outlook, one meets with two apparently opposing tendencies. On the one hand, his Hindu background may have predisposed him towards universalism to a certain extent, for he wrote in 1821:

It is well-known to the whole world, that no people on earth are more tolerant than the Hindoos, who believe all men to be equally within the reach of Divine beneficence, which embraces the good of every religious sect and denomination.[6]

On the other hand, however, Roy in his own eyes, never ceased to be a Brahmin. Sir Brajendranath Seal has pointed out that 'he was a Brahmin of Brahmins, always claiming to be within the Brahmin fold and keeping his *Upavita* as an external mark of that communion'. But Seal goes on to refer to his 'boldly taking heterodox food and drink, adopting a Mohammaden child and calling him Rajaram, associating with the missionaries, crossing the seas, fighting Suttee, caste, and all manner of degenerate customs of the day that weighed down women and Sudras.'[7]

We have established one characteristic of Roy's profile – his Hindu ancestry in the form of his Brahmanical heritage. It however, was not as limiting in his case as it could have been. We also discover from an account of his friend, William Adam, that he was independent-minded, and had arguments with his father. William Adam wrote:

> It is not often that we get an insight in Hindu family life but his son gave me a slight glance at least in referring to the amicable differences that arose between himself and his father on this subject. I inferred from what R.R. said that he always left it to his father, as the head and most venerable member of the family to open the question which he thought fit to meet, and when he had finished his immediate argument, he was generally willing to listen to his son with patience, which sometimes, however, forsake him. The son's response after the necessary preliminary admissions, usually began with the adversative article 'But' (*Kintu*). 'But notwithstanding all this, the orthodox conclusion you aim at does not follow.' The father complained of this, and, on one occasion at least, burst out in the tone of remonstrance, as of an injured party. 'Whatever argument I adduce you have always your *Kintu*, your counter-statement, your counter-argument, your counter-conclusion to oppose to me.' The son recounted this to me with half a smile on his lips and a touch of humour in his voice, but without any expression of disrespect to his father.[8]

One is, therefore, not surprised to discover what Roy tells us about himself later on: 'When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript calling in question the idolatrous system of the Hindoos. This, together with my known sentiments on the subject, having produced a coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels.' But when he had reached the age of twenty, he tells us: 'my father recalled me, and restored me in his favour…'.[9]

Thus it seems that the first step Roy took in the direction of evolving a religiously independent position was to take a critical view of his own tradition, whose iconolatry he found difficult to condone. But he was careful to point out later that

> The ground which I took in all my controversies was, not that of opposition to Brahminism, but to a perversion of it; and I endeavoured to show that the idolatry of the Brahmins was contrary to the practice of their ancestors, and the principles of the ancient books and authorities, which they profess to revere and obey. Notwithstanding the violence of the opposition and resistance to my opinions, several highly respectable persons both among my own relations and others, began to adopt the same sentiments.[10]

Though Roy was critical of certain aspects of Hinduism, he, however, did not abandon it. Yet the fact that he could take a critical view of his own tradition may be seen as an indication of a latent universalism, as it indicated that some day he might transcend its confines.

The next forward movement in Roy's thought, in the direction of universalism, took place when, after the death of his father, he settled down in Murshidabad, where he wrote the first of his many tracts: Tuhfát-ul-Muwāḥḥidīn or *A Gift to the Monotheists.* It was written in Persian with a preface in Arabic, and, although published in 1804, did not become 'known to the public until it was translated by a learned Maulavi in 1884'. In this book one meets with an early statement of what turned out to be one of the central ideas on which his thought would converge repeatedly. He wrote:

> I travelled in the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well as in hilly lands, and found the inhabitants thereof agreeing generally in believing in the personality of One Being Who is the source of all that exists and its governor, and disagreeing in giving peculiar attributes to that Being and in holding different creeds consisting of the doctrines of religion and precepts of *haram* (forbidden) and *halal* (lawful). From this induction it has been known to me that turning generally towards One Eternal Being, is like a natural tendency in human beings and is common to all individuals of mankind equally. And the inclination of each sect of mankind to a particular god or gods, holding certain especial attributes, and to some peculiar forms of worship or devotion, is an excrescent quality grown (in mankind) by habit and training.[11]

Just as early Roy had found idolatry inconsistent with the spiritual nature of God, he now found the existence of intermediaries inconsistent with the direct guidance such a God had to offer. He wrote:

> Some people argue in this way that the Almighty Creator has opened the way of guidance to mortal beings through the medium of prophets or leaders of religions. This is evidently futile, because the same people believe that all things in creation, whether good or bad, proceed from the Great Creator without any intermediate agency, and that the apparent causes are the means and conditions of that (i.e., their coming into existence). Hence it is to be seen whether the sending of prophets and revelations of them from God, are immediately from God or through intermediate agency.

> In the first case, there is no necessity of an intermediate agency for guidance to salvation. And in the second case, there should be a series of intermediate agencies. Hence the advent of prophets and revelation like other external things have no reference to God, but depend upon the invention of an inventor. Prophets and others should not be particularly connected (or mixed up) with the teaching of a faith. Besides, what one nation calls a guide to a true faith, another calls a misleading to an erroneous way.[12]

This text is also remarkable from several other points of view. Roy clearly senses that some of his statements may not go down well with his audience. It was clear to him, however, that truth may lie with a minority and the majority may even be ranged against it. He wrote: 'It is to be seen that the truth of a saying does not depend upon the multiplicity of the sayers and the non-reliability of a narration cannot arise simply out of the paucity of the number of the narrators. For it is admitted by the seekers of truth that truth is to be followed, although it is against the majority of the people.'[13]

And he was to write later:

> By taking the path which conscience and sincerity direct, I, born a Brahmun, have exposed myself to the complainings and reproaches, of even some of my relations, whose prejudices are strong, and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system. But, these, however accumulated, I can tranquilly bear, trusting that a day will arrive when my humble endeavors will be viewed with justice – perhaps acknowledged with gratitude. At any rate, whatever men may say, I cannot be deprived of this consolation: my motives are acceptable to that Being, who beholds in secret, and compensates openly![14]

Roy had also begun to evaluate his co-religionists critically. As U.N. Ball points out, Rammohun classifies people into four groups:

(1) A class of deceivers who in order to attract the people to themselves wilfully invent doctrines, creeds and faiths and put the people to troubles and cause disunion among them.
(2) A class of deceived people, who without enquiring into the fact, adhere to others.

(3) A class of people who are deceivers and also deceived; they are those who have themselves faith in the sayings of another [and] induce others to adhere to them.
(4) Those who, by the help of Almighty God, are neither deceivers nor deceived.[15]

Roy was later on to use this taxonomy, especially the first category, in scathing criticism of Hindu priestcraft.[16]

It appears, however, that just as he had alienated the Hindus by his iconoclasm, his attack on what Iqbal was to later call Pirism in Islam did not go down well with the Muslims and he may have had to leave Murshidabad on that account.[17]

After these brushes with Hinduism and Islam, Roy next came in contact with Christianity. In 1820 he published a tract entitled *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. In this work, however, he concentrated on the moral doctrines of the New Testament on the following grounds:

> A conviction in the mind of its total ignorance of the nature and of the specific attributes of the Godhead, and a sense of doubt respecting the real essence of the soul, give rise to feelings of great dissatisfaction with our limited powers, as well as with all human acquirements which fail to inform us on these interesting points. On the other hand, a notion of the existence of a supreme superintending power, the author and preserver of this harmonious system, who has organized and who regulates such an infinity of celestial and terrestrial objects, and a due estimation of that law which teaches that man should do unto others as he would wish to be done by, reconcile us to human nature, and tend to render our existence agreeable to ourselves and profitable to the rest of mankind. The former of these sources of satisfaction, namely, a belief in God, prevails generally, being derived either from tradition and instruction, or from an attentive survey of the wonderful skill and contrivance displayed in the works of nature. The latter, although it is partially taught also in every system of religion with which I am acquainted, is principally inculcated by Christianity.[18]

But Roy's attempt to dissociate Christian theology from morality caused an uproar among the missionaries, especially as he thought that the Christian doctrine of trinity seemed to compromise God's unity. Roy thus became a Unitarian and in fact corresponded with

fellow-Unitarians in Boston, but he was branded a 'heathen' closer to home.[19]

By now Roy had settled down in Calcutta, the intellectual and political capital of India, having become financially secure by the time he turned forty-two. It is now time to review his evolution in the direction of universalism. Such a review suggests that he saw an ethical monotheism as constituting the core of the truly religious life. Accretions on, or deviations from this doctrine, however, had occurred in every major religion he had encountered, and he had also incurred the hostility of the followers of each of these religions for pointing out what he regarded to be their deviation from the truth. As a matter of fact 'In these religious controversies he had to defend the original Hinduism, Islam and Christianity against the champions of orthodoxy in each of these churches or religious communities. He had also to defend Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, each, against the attacks of the champions of the other two.'[20] He also argued against the futility of asserting the superiority of one religion over the other.[21]

III

It is clear from the above discussion that so far as Roy was concerned, the non-idolatrous worship of one God was not possible within the confines of either Hinduism or Islam or Christianity as they were actually practised, even though it lay at the heart of these religions. It should not come as a total surprise, therefore, that there emerged in 1828 under Roy's guidance, a body precisely for such worship, a body which ultimately developed into the Brahmo Samāj.

The title deed of the Brahmo Samāj, to which Roy was a signatory, gives an interesting and perhaps also an accurate picture of where Roy was at by now. The following passage of the Deed is particularly notable, although lengthy and full of the legalese natural to such a document. The Deed was intended to set up a 'place of public meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober religious and devout manner for the worship and adoration of the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe but not under or by any other name designation or title peculiarly used for and applied to any particular Being or Beings by any man or set of men whatsoever and that no graven image statues

or sculpture carving painting picture portrait or the likeness of anything shall be admitted within the said messuages building land tenements hereditaments and premises and that no sacrifice offering or oblation of any kind or thing shall ever be permitted therein and that no animal or living creature shall within or on the said messuage building land tenements hereditaments and premises be deprived of life either from religious purposes or for food and that no eating or drinking (except such as shall be necessary by any accident for the preservation of life) feasting or rioting be permitted therein or thereon and than in conducting the said worship and adoration no object animate or inanimate that has been or is or shall hereafter become or be recognized as an object of worship be any man or set of men shall be reviled or slightingly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to either in preaching praying or in the hymns or other mode of worship that may be delivered or used in the said Messuage or building and that no sermon preaching discourse prayer or hymn be delivered made or used in such worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe to the promotion of charity morality piety benevolence virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union Between men of all religious persuasions and creeds and also that a person of Good repute and well known for his knowledge piety and morality be employed'.[22] It should be noted that, according to the Deed:

(1) only one God was to be worshipped;
(2) that this worship was to be non-idolatrous;
(3) that this worship was to be non-sanguinary;
(4) that any theist, including non-Hindus, could attest; and
(5) the worship as meant to unify '*men of all religious persuasions and creed*'.

This raises the question: Was Roy envisaging the Brahmo Samāj as the nucleus of a universal religion? Indeed, what was Roy's position with regard to the relationship among the various religions?

In this context several views have been offered. Sometimes these are mentioned alongside without being distinguished, which can cause some confusion.[23] Sometimes the same scholar seems to adopt more than one viewpoint. Thus, 'a controversy of a nobler kind' surrounds the issue of the religious position Roy finally adopted and it would be useful to distinguish among these various viewpoints for the sake of clarity.

IV

One extreme position in this regard is represented in a document from the Madras Record Office. It describes the reactions of certain inhabitants of Berhampur (Ganjam) to Rammohun Roy's religious views.[24] In this document, Roy is denounced as 'neither a Christian nor a Mohammadan, nor a Hindu'. (This contemporary assessment may be contrasted with a modern and sympathetic one that 'if he was a Hindu of the Hindus, he was also a Mohammadan with the Mohammadans, and a Christian with Christians'.)[25] The merit of the criticism levelled against Roy's position lies in indicating the danger that one who claims to accept all may be accepted by none – the universal pitfall of universalism. The document offers the following fuller estimate of Roy's position: 'In the case of Rammohun Roy, how intelligent and man of talents he may be, yet from his late profession of belief in one God, in an irregular course, forsaking all religious rites, and ordinances of his caste, as a Brahmin, he is not accounted for among any regulated class of religions. He is neither a Christian, a Mohammaden, or a Hindu, but a free thinking man, abandoned by all religions.'[26]

One of the petitioners even states that 'in the month of August 1827', he 'ran up from Ganjam to Calcutta on Dawk to see this person Rammohun Roy and to ascertain the religion he followed, but to his extreme regret found that his religion is no religion and his laws are no laws, but a conglomeration of all stitched into a singular one'.[27]

Any attempt at universalism runs the risk of being considered inauthentic and arbitrarily eclectic, along with the additional risk that one who belongs to all may be said to belong to none![28] Both of these dangers are reflected in the petition, but can Roy in fairness be accused along these lines? When it is alleged that he had no religion, what is obviously meant is that Roy could not be clearly placed within a historically identifiable religion. Two considerations must be borne in mind at this point. First, that Roy himself never claimed to have ceased to be a Hindu and, in point of fact, defended Hinduism[29] against what he regarded as unfair attacks on it.[30] Second, if by having no religion is meant that Roy was not 'religious', this does not seem to be true. In a formal sense he continued to be a Hindu and died as one. This is at least partly proved by his 'utterance of the sacred AUM – one of the last words he was heard to utter'.[31] In a broader sense, he can be said to have believed in a form of universal theism. In a moral sense, he led an exemplary life in several ways, as is

reflected in his agitation against Suttee, and so on. Roy's humanitarianism is well-known.[32] It is clear then that the view that Roy had no religion is misleading, for he 'loathed and abominated' scepticism 'as something worse than idolatry'.[33]

Another extreme position seems to be represented by a view which is the opposite of the one discussed above – and anticipated in that discussion, namely, that he was a Hindu as well as a Muslim and a Christian. Thus some Christian friends claimed that he was 'in the end a decided Christian',[34] and 'after his death, Moslems claimed him for Islam'.[35] This position is difficult to sustain in the light of the facts already discussed. He studied and perhaps absorbed elements from Christianity and Islam but to say that he became a Christian or a Muslim, in the usual acceptations of the terms, seems to go too far. Indeed 'differing estimates of his faith had been anticipated by him. Babu N. Bose used to tell how "Rammohun Roy before leaving for England, told him that the followers of every prevailing religion would reckon him, after his death, as one of their co-religionists. The Mohammedans would call him a Mohammedan, the Hindus would call him a Vedantic Hindu, the Christians a Unitarian Christian.' But Babu N. Bose added, 'he really belonged to no sect. His religion was Universal Theism". As he believed this principle to be the quintessence of every religion, he was able to approach the advocates of the most different creeds with a sympathy and an emphasis on points of agreement which they could only interpret as complete adhesion.'[36]

A third extreme position seems to be represented by claims that he had founded – or at least anticipated – a universal religion. Thus V.S. Naravane argues that 'he seriously contemplated a universal religion which would some day be accepted by the whole of mankind'.[37] In support of this claim he cites the pamphlet on 'Universal Religion', published in 1829. Elsewhere, he points out, that 'one of Ram Mohen's last works, published shortly before his death, is a booklet on "Universal Religion" in which he "takes the lowest common measure of all religions, eliminating everything that divides one religion from another."'[38] This last-mentioned booklet I have not been able to trace but the tract of 1829 can be examined closely, with a view to determining whether it provides for a universal religion. The following summary of the tract, along with a critical comment at the end, is provided by Biswas and Ganguli:

In 1829 he published a tract entitled, *The Universal Religion; Religious Instructions founded on Sacred Authorities*. This is a short catechism,

with proof texts from the sacred writing of Hinduism. It described worship as 'a contemplation of the attributes of the Supreme Being'. It styles the object of worship 'the author and Governor of the Universe' 'imperceptible and indefinable', but by His creation and government of the universe known to exist. Worship is to be performed 'by bearing in mind that the Author and Governor of this visible Universe is the Supreme Being and comparing this idea with the sacred writings and with reason'. Furthermore 'it is proper to regulate our food and conduct agreeably to the sacred writings'. For this worship 'a suitable place is certainly preferable, but not necessary'; 'in whatever place, that quarter, and that time is the most proper'. This kind of worship cannot be hostile to any other kinds, nor can they reasonably be hostile to it; 'for all believe the object whom they adore to be the Author and Governor of the Universe'.

This is a bold statement to make in face of the facts of fetishism and kindred cults. The infinitely diverse religions of the world will scarcely yield as their common denominator a Theism so pure and lofty as Rammohun's 'Universal Religion'. But Rammohun believed in it intensely and the progress of the Brahma Sabha was witness to his faith.[39]

A little reflection will suggest that, by universal religion, Roy meant what was universal in religion rather than a universal religion. Even Sir Brajendra Nath Seal, who otherwise generally treats of Roy's concepts carefully, seems to fall into the trap when he says that Roy 'had been brought by his pioneer studies in Comparative Religion to Universalism, – *and, what is more, to a Universal Scripture, a Universal authority as underlying all historic scriptures and all historic authorities*'.[40] There seems to be little evidence to support this, especially the idea of a Universal Scripture, reminiscent of the Islamic Umm-al-Kitāb or the Mother-Book.

Sir Seal's views on other aspects of Roy's universal religion are, however, illuminating, especially in the following ways. First, Seal points out that although in their pure forms according to Roy, Hinduism (i.e. Vedānta), Islam and Christianity shared a common theism, they stressed different aspects of the same intuition. Thus the Vedānta was 'strongest in *Jnana*', Islam in the sense of 'divine government' and Christianity 'in ethical and social guidance to peace and happiness in the path in life'.[41] Second, Seal at times seems to

recognize that what Roy was really trying to build up was 'one theistic Fraternity',[42] rather than a universal religion, or so it would appear. Third, on the question of what to do with the creeds and councils and rituals and symbols which divide religions, Roy emphasized that in the case of creed 'an original purity of doctrine and practice' should be restored, which was corrupted by later priestcraft and that in the case of rituals and symbols the accent must be on simplicity so that the rituals clarify one's attitude towards rather than obfuscate the object of worship.[43] Fourth, with respect to religious law, Roy advocated its reform in the light of rationality.[44]

It is in elaborating Roy's idea of a universal religion as an ideal, however, that Seal seems to provide a particularly useful perspective from one point of view. He points out that Roy's view did not carry the assumption that 'the great historic religions, these national embodiments of universalism, will cease or be merged one in another'.[45] He, however, further elaborates Roy's views thus.

> To put the Raja's implications in terms of our own age, this is not a static idea, but a developing idea, and as the different religions in the course of their own forward march approach one another and approach the common centre more and more, the centre of convergence itself shifts or moves forwards; so that the ideal always remains an ideal, beckoning ever forward and upward to the infinitude and beatitudes of God.[46]

Seal seems to be on sound ground in indicating a centre of universal convergence in terms of Roy's thought, but it seems his own further interpretation of a movement towards the centre is more dynamic than Roy's. It is not so much Roy's position, as Seal's own dynamic interpretation of Roy's position.

Yet another interpretation of Roy's religious position has it that he merely used religious reform to secure the greatest good of the greatest number. Thus Kissory Chand Mitter has argued that 'Rammohun Roy was a religious Bentamite, and estimated the different creeds existing in the world, according to his notion of their tendency, in his view, to promote the maximization of human happiness, and the minimization of human misery. His patronage therefore, of any system of creed cannot be construed into a profession of it'.[47] The point of view has its merit. It serves to explain Roy's reforming zeal. It is further claimed, however, that 'His advocacy and support of the doctrines inculcated by religions which are in themselves diametrically

opposed to each other, though it might apparently evidence his vacillation, was in fact the result of his religious utilitarianism; for we can confidently assert that in reference to his religious belief not the slightest change took place in his mind for the last fifty years of his life'.[48] This leaves one with the impression that no sincere beliefs sustained Roy for fifty years of his life, and that religion for him was merely an instrument of social engineering. It is, therefore, important to note that the following passage deals with his religious, and not merely reformist, convictions.

> From his first renunciation of Hindu idolatry at the age of sixteen to the last moment of his existence, he maintained his religious sentiments, whatever they were, nearly unaltered. The real religious sentiments of the Hindu reformer are embodied in a pamphlet written in the most choice Persian, with an Arabic preface. Though printed in his lifetime and seen by some of his friends, yet it was not published until his death; for he gave it as his last injunction, on leaving his country for Europe, that it should be published after his departure from this world. This work which is entitled '*Tohufut-ul Mowa-hedeen*' or a Present to Unitarians, discloses his belief in the unity of the Deity, His infinite power and infinite goodness, and in the immortality of the soul. It breathes an uncompromising and inveterate hostility to idolatry in all its forms. While due meed of applause is given to the Mohammedan creed for being based on what he considered as the great doctrine of unity, prophetical pretensions are treated with merited ridicule and contempt.[49]

What then are we to say in conclusion about Roy's concept of universal religion? It seems that the following conclusions are in order:

(1) Roy did employ the expression 'universal religion'.
(2) The use of this expression, however, should not be taken to mean that he intended a universal religion to replace all existing religions; in the way a universal language may replace all other languages.
(3) Roy seemed to refer to the element common in all religions by the term universal religion, and this common element, according to him, consisted in the simple non-idolatrous worship of a single God. Its inculcation did not mean the abolition of all religions but rather the purification of these religions from within

by the removal of such practises as conflicted with devotion to God and the welfare of human beings.

Pandit Sivanath Sastri thus summed up Roy's vision of universal religion in 1910 (wherein the Theistic Church of India is the English rendering for Brahmo Samāj):

> The Theistic Church of India, has a great and glorious mission as far as this country is concerned – namely to fuse in a bond of spiritual union the conflicting claims of Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity, by laying insistence on their universal aspects; for certainly that was the grand ideal before the mind of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the founder of Brahmo Samāj. Reformers like Nanak, Kabir and Chaitanya aspired to fuse together Hinduism and Mohammedanism, the two conflicting faiths with which they came in contact. But Ram Mohun Roy went further. The study of the three religions, Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity, convinced him that there was a common element that unites them all, and he was also convinced that a universal Theistic Church could be organized on those common lines. The formation of the Brahmo Samāj was a result of that conviction....[50]

V

How did Roy's concept of universal religion and his efforts to promote it fare in the light of later history? We need to remind ourselves at this point that Roy, through the Brahmo Samāj or 'Society of God' had:

> hoped to transform radically the fact of Hindu life and religion. Although he intended the Samāj to be a society of true worshippers of the one God of all religions, *in actual practice it turned out to be a congregation of Hindu theists.* No images, statues or paintings were allowed in the hall of worship. No sacrifices or oblations of any kind were permitted, and only monotheistic services, prayers and hymns were allowed. An innovation was the introduction of congregational worship. Among the prominent Hindus who joined the Brahmo Samāj were Devendranath Tagore, and Keshab Chandra Sen, and for some time the society gained strength among the intellectuals of Bengal.[51]

The course of the movement, however, in many ways ran counter to its universalistic aspirations. First, only the Hindu theists responded. Second, the movement even drifted away from the mainstream of Hinduism. Roy 'like many other religious reformers, has claimed that he was not starting a new sect, but only purifying the old religion. There were elements in Rammohun's thought, however, that made it virtually certain that the Brahmo Samãj would separate itself from the main stream of Hinduism. His rejection of the use of idols in worship, his attachment to eighteenth century rationalism, his disbelief in transmigration, all ran counter to traditional Hinduism'.[52] Third, not only did the Society not become universal in the sense of reaching beyond the Hindus (and even within Hinduism became virtually a sect) its universal aspirations were further compromised when it suffered two major schisms – one in 1865 and the other in 1878.[53]

When viewed from the standpoint of Hindu orthodoxy, it is, therefore, the height of irony, that a movement which started out as a universal movement in one sense should be double-faulted by Frithjof Schuon in the following passage, for not being really universal in another sense:

> What makes the definition of orthodoxy rather troublesome is that it presents two principal modes, the one essential or intrinsic, and the other formal or extrinsic: the latter is being in accord with a revealed form, and the former the being in accord with the essential and universal truth, with or without being in accord with any particular form, so that the two modes are sometimes opposed externally. To give an example, it can be said that Buddhism is extrinsically heterodox in relation to Hinduism, because it marks a departure from the basic forms of the latter, and at the same time intrinsically orthodox, because it is in accord with that universal truth from which both traditions proceed; on the other hand the Brahmo-Samãj, like every other variety of 'progressive' neo-Hinduism, is doubly heterodox, first in relation to Hinduism itself and secondly in relation to truth unqualified; heterodox, therefore, both from the particular point of view and of the essence.[54]

In a word, the universalistic aspirations of Roy remained unrealized.

3

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905)

I

So far as the Brahmo Samāj was concerned,[1] the mantle of Rammohun Roy fell on the shoulders of Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905)[2]. Rammohun Roy, who was a close associate of Debendranath Tagore's father, Dwarkanath Tagore,[3] may have foreseen this in a prescient moment.

> During his boyhood, Debendranath was well-acquainted with Rammohun who left a permanent impression upon his mind. Before leaving for England, Rammohun visited Dwarakanath's house to bid him good-bye. Debendranath was not present at home. So, he was sent for. On this arrival Rammohun gave him a hearty embrace and expressed the hope that Debendranath would be his successor to the sacred office. What Rammohun saw in Debendranath is not known, but 'Providence' worked in that direction.[4]

Debendranath Tagore, however, though he adopted an anti-idolatrous attitude early in life, both under the influence of Roy[5] and that of his own reflection,[6] did not formally join the Brahmo Samāj till December 1843, when he was initiated into it. His son describes the occasion thus on the authority of Pandit Shivanath Shastri: 'My father himself and nineteen others were the first to sign the Brāhmic covenant and publicly accept initiation at the hands of Pandit Vidyāvagish. As the twenty young men, dressed in suitable attire, approached the Pandit, and repeated with reverential awe the solemn words of

the covenant, the feelings of the old minister overpowered him to such an extent that he sobbed like a child, and could not deliver the sermon he had intended to preach, but only said, "Oh! how I wish that Rammohun Roy were present on this day."'[7]

Prior to joining the Brahmo Samāj, Debendranath Tagore had already had some spiritual experiences and had engaged in other spiritual activities. From an experience of his youth he drew the iconoclastic conclusion that 'this endless sky and this endless universe could not be the handiwork of a finite being.'[8] Another experience occurred when his grandmother, whom he used to call Didima, and who was particularly dear to him,[9] died:

> On the night before Didima's death I was sitting at Nimtola Ghat on a coarse mat near the shed. It was the night of the full moon; the moon had risen, the burning ground was near. They were singing the Holy Name to Didima:
>
> Will such a day every come, that while uttering the name of Hari, life will leave me?
>
> The sounds reached my ears faintly, borne on the night-wind; at this opportune moment a strange sense of the unreality of all things suddenly entered my mind. I was as if no longer the same man. A strong aversion to wealth arose within me. The coarse bamboo-mat on which I sat seemed to be my fitting seat, carpets and costly spreadings seemed hateful, in my mind was awakened a joy unfelt before. I was then eighteen years old.[10]

But in a sense, a socially more consequential event was his acquaintance with the Upaniṣads. The accidental way in which he chanced upon the opening verse of the Īśāvāsyopaniṣad had an air of spiritual romance about it[11] and the incident has been narrated often. But what is perhaps more significant is the fact that the discovery of the Upaniṣads led him to form a society of like-minded people, called the Tatwabodhini Sabha, which ultimately merged with the Brahmo Samāj, when Debendranath took over its responsibility.

II

Debendranath's subsequent association with the Brahmo Samāj is marked by a significant doctrinal development. At issue was the

doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas, which was being assailed by Christian missionaries from the outside and by the rationalists, like Akshay Kumar Datta, from within the Samāj.[12] At first the Samāj was inclined to defend the traditional position,[13] but finally 'At a general meeting of the Brāhmas, it was agreed that the Vedas, Upanishads, and other ancient writings were not to be accepted as infallible guides, that Reason and Conscience were to be the supreme authority, and the teachings of the Scriptures were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonised with the light within us.'[14]

This happened in 1851,[15] and was accompanied by some interesting developments. First, Vedic authority was abrogated. Its place was taken by a creed. As Debendranath himself writes:

> The problem that now occupied my thoughts was this: what was to be the common ground for all Brāhmas? Tantras, Puranas, Vedas, Vedanta, Upanishads, none of these afforded a basis of unity for Brāhmas, a foundation for Brāhma Dharma. I decided that the Brāhma Dharma must have a creed that should be the meeting-point of all Brāhmas.
>
> Thinking thus, I laid my heart open to God, and said, 'illumine Thou the darkness of my soul.' By His mercy my heart was instantly enlightened. With the help of this light I could see a creed for the Brāhma Dharma, which I immediately took down in pencil on a piece of paper lying before me; which paper I threw at once into a box and locked it. It was then the year 1770 (A.D. 1848), and I was thirty-one years of age. The seed of creed thus remained within the box.[16]

Next came the sacred book, the Brāhma Dharma Grantha, which 'was produced in a state of deep religious absorption and dictated at a single sitting'.[17] It should be noted, however, that though Vedic authority was rejected, the scriptures were still respected and used.[18]

An even more significant development occurred in 1865 when Keshub Chunder Sen, whose entry into the Samāj in 1859 had been much heralded, withdrew from the Samāj. This was the first schism in the Samāj. The immediate cause seems to have been the issue of whether those conducting the services should be allowed to wear the sacred thread. Debendranath Tagore yielded to Keshub at first but, as his son points out 'on second thoughts, reflecting perhaps on what was due to the old minister who had suffered so much for the Samāj, and being desirous of retaining and harmonising the conservative

and progressive elements in the Samāj, he changed his mind, and the old thread-bearing Brāhmas were replaced as ministers'.[19] He also adds that the 'rupture between the two parties was further widened by an intermarriage between two persons of different castes, solemnised by Keshab in 1863; this was a reform of a radical character which my father was not prepared to adopt, in opposition to the sentiments of the entire Hindu community'.[20]

After the schism 'for all practical purposes the Maharshi retired from public life'.[21] It is striking that although his autobiography was dictated towards the end of his life, it closes with his return from the Himalayas on 15th November, 1858 in response to an inspiration to return and revitalize the Samāj.[22] Whether his subsequent autobiographical silence has something to do with the subsequent stormy history of the Samāj is not altogether clear.[23]

III

With the backdrop of his life and thought before us, one may now ask: how can these be related to Debendranath Tagore's concept of universal religion? Widely differing, even diametrically opposed, views are encountered on this point. Ishwar Chandra Harris sees him as continuing the tradition of universalism initiated by Roy.[24] David Kopf sees him as oscillating between nationalism and universalism[25] and Vishwanath Naravane says his 'world-outlook was essentially Indian'.[26] Which of these assessments is closest to the mark?

It is difficult to see Debendranath as continuing the kind of universalism associated with Roy, 'although he never fully disowned the universalist legacy of Rammohun',[27] for, unlike Roy, he felt neither the religious nor the secular impact of the West deeply. 'It is singular that the one field of religious inspiration which was foreign to him was the Hebrew Scriptures. He was never known to quote the Bible nor do we find any allusion to Christ or His teachings in his sermons.'[28] As for Western secular influences, 'certain western ideas and values did affect him because of the general atmosphere and enlightenment and liberalism which they promoted',[29] but that was about it. The picture of Debendranath, as vacillating between nationalism and universalism seems justified to some extent, but it is possible, with equal plausibility, to see in this process the steady rationalization of his beliefs. He can be seen as gradually evolving, with the

interplay of reflection, reason and conscience, in spiritual terms. Thus the disavowal of image-worship, the disregard of his father's *śrāddha*, the rejection of the infallibility of the Vedas, and so on can be seen as possessing a consistent direction. It is clear that Debendranath was convinced of the superiority of experience over scriptural authority, even on the issue of abandoning Vedic authority. As Sivanath Sastri points out:

> It may also be noted in this connection that, as a mark of the great change that had taken place on the subject of Vedic infallibility, a characteristic passage from the Upanishads, expressive of the fundamental principle of intuitive religion, began to be published at the head of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* from this time, which goes on to say: ' The *Rik Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda,* and *Atharva Veda,* and *Siksha, Kalpa, Vyakaran, Nirukta, Chhandas* and *Jyotish* are inferior; that is truly superior which enables a man to attain to the Eternal and Immutable Being.'[30]

It was in his social rather than religious views that the 'commitment to nationalism' may be said to *alternate* with universalism:

> It is sometimes said that the Maharshi was conservative in his instincts. This charge might have been true in respect of some of his social beliefs, but so far as his religious convictions were concerned, it is definitely misplaced. If it were not so, it would not have been possible for him to renounce a theory of the Vedas including the Upanishads, tenaciously held by him for years.[31]

Once this distinction is drawn – between his social and religious views, it becomes clear that Debendranath 'was intensely national in his religious ideal, whereas Keshub's outlook was more cosmopolitan'.[32] But this 'Indianness' was more social than spiritual. Although Debendranath does not seem to draw on Christianity, Islam may have influenced his ideals.[33] But what is significant is that 'he was thoroughly familiar with the Sufi literature of Persia as well as India and was fond of Hafiz, whom he described as "that adorable madman"'.[34] But while socially a Hindu and a supporter of Hinduism,[35] to what extent was he religiously so? J.N. Farquhar's following account suffers from a Christian bias but even after it has been discounted, the fact remains that he was hardly an orthodox Hindu:

> He regarded himself as a true Hindu, standing in the long noble succession of the thinkers and rapt devotees of the Vedānta; and it is indeed true that a large measure of their reverence and inspiration had descended to him. But he failed to realize that the rejection of the authority of the Vedas, and above all of the doctrine of transmigration and karma, had set him outside the nexus of the peculiar beliefs and aspirations of Hinduism. Since he was unwilling to learn from Christ, and since he stood apart from the chief source of Hinduism's religious passion – the desire for release from rebirth, – his Samāj has barely succeeded in keeping afloat amid the fierce currents of modern thought and practical life.[36]

The relationship of Debendranath Tagore to universal religion, as visualized in all the three descriptions above, is far from clear. He is perhaps not sufficiently narrow in his outlook to be regarded as parochial, and not sufficiently broad-based to be considered as universal. But much as scholars may differ in labelling him, all seem to be agreed that he had a deeply spiritual and mystical dimension to his being, which earned him the honorific of Maharṣi.[37] Indeed, his

> great and noble character and his lofty spiritual nature so impressed his fellow-citizens that he was universally known as the *Maharshi*, the great Rishi or Seer; and he was looked upon to by all sections of the Samāj as the saintly patriarch of the movement. I had the pleasure of seeing and talking with him a few months before his death. The bleached complexion and massive architecture of his face revealed even then, at the age of eighty-seven, the lofty spiritual nature and the sensitive heart which had done so much in the far-away years.[38]

IV

It now seems fair to ask: what, if any, universal element is to be found in Debendranath Tagore? It could be pointed out that if 'Roy called his countrymen to the contemplation of God as Truth, Debendranath taught them how to hold communion with Him in love and in spirit'.[39] Or that if Roy's 'conception of God was rational', Debendranath's 'approach to religion was both intuitional

and rational'.[40] Or even further, that in not following Śaṅkara and in espousing a thoroughgoing theism,[41] Debendranath, more than Roy, provided for a broader basis for universalism, even if he did not build on it. The same could be said of the rejection of Vedic authority, especially if the implication is added that the Brahmoism of Debendranath 'did not recognise any book as infallible. But it believed in truth found in any scripture'.[42] His stay among the Sikhs could be referred too as well, but all this soon begins to sound like special pleading.

It seems that the really universal element in the religion of Debendranath is provided by the fact that his mystical experiences as revealed in his autobiography possess a universal dimension.[43]

This has been demonstrated by Evelyn Underhill in the introduction to the autobiography. Underhill points out that 'such metaphors as the Following Love, the Knocker at the Door, the Seeker of the Lost, the King and the Beggar-Maid' run like 'a thread of fire' not only through the pages of his autobiography but the whole range of mystical literature;[44] that the threefold realization of Brahman according to Debendranath is 'singularly reminiscent of St Paul;'[45] that both St Francis of Assisi and Debendranath gave up a life of luxury under comparable conditions,[46] that 'in the life of the Maharshi, the illuminative period seems to have lasted for seventeen years...and to have followed a course closely parallel to that we find in the case of many great Christian saints;'[47] that the 'way in which the Book of Brāhma-dharma came to be written' is an 'unusually perfect example of that inspired composition, related on the one hand to the phenomena of automatic writings, on the other to the outpourings of prophetic genius;'[48] and that his trials and tribulations in life again parallel those of the mystics.[49] If Evelyn Underhill is right, if Debendranath's autobiography 'must rank with the few classic autobiographies bequeathed to us by certain of the mystics and saints: Suso, Madame Guyon, even the great St Teresa herself', and 'is essentially of the same class as the *Testament* of Ignatius Loyola, the *Journal* of George Fox',[50] then it is clear that the mystical experience of Debendranath possesses a universal dimension in its cross-cultural dimension.

> Here, too, we learn to appreciate the deep saying of the Sūfi, 'Those drunk with God, though they are many, are yet one.' Though the mystical theologies of the East and the West differ widely – though the ideal of life which they hold out to the soul differs too – yet in

the experience of the saints this conflict is seen to be transcended. When the Love of God is reached, divergencies become impossible; for the soul has passed beyond the sphere of the manifold, and is immersed in the One Reality.[51]

4

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–84)

I

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–1884) can lay claim on our attention in several capacities: as a charismatic Brahmo-Samāj leader;[1] as an Indian figure who was perhaps more explicitly influenced by Christianity than many others;[2] and as one 'striving after a universal religion'.[3] It is this striving after a universal religion in his life and thought which concerns us here.

II

Although the life of Keshub Chunder Sen can be chronologically divided into perhaps no less than eight periods in general terms,[4] in relation to the concept of universal religion it seems to fall more or less clearly into two phases. Both of these are associated with a schism in the history of the Brahmo Samāj. The first phase covers the period from 1864–1866, during which the events which led to the first split in the movement occurred. The second phase covers the period from 1875–1878 during which the events which culminated in the second split took place. These schisms are fairly well-documented. It should suffice for our purposes to indicate that the first split occurred over the question of whether only Brahmins should officiate at ceremonies and should they wear the sacred thread if they did so, and the second split occurred over the issue of the marriage of the daughter of Keshub Chunder Sen to a prince, both of whom were under what many

members of the Brahmo Samāj regarded as the minimum desirable age of marriage.

Of the two, the second period is of greater significance from our point of view. The period beginning with 1875 and ending in 1878 with the schism over the Cuch Behar marriage controversy is ('between 1876 and 1878 Keshub Sen charged remarkably')[5] pivotal in this regard. It is useful to include the year 1875 as well, as it happens to be the year when Keshub Chunder Sen met the leading modern Hindu mystic Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa (1836–1886). He had already met Dayānanda Sarasvatī (1824–1883), another leading figure of the Hindu renaissance, in 1872.[6]

It needs to be recognized at the very outset that Keshub Chunder Sen was religiously inclined from early on in his life, as is clear from his autobiographical work – the Jiban Veda.[7] According to this account 'the first beginning of asceticism was as early as the fourteenth year' and manifested itself in his giving up eating fish.[8] Of much greater consequence was his marriage in 1856, which a biographer describes as one of the 'traumatic experiences' of his adolescence.[9] From the point of view of our theme, however, some other aspects of his adolescence also deserve consideration. First, he did not show much interest in Hinduism, but was quite taken up with Christianity and freely associated with missionaries, to the extent that 'most of his friends ridiculed him for his Biblical studies and accused him of being a Christian'. Second, Keshub Chunder Sen was already feeling the need to share his spiritual insights with others and would circulate slips with exhortations like 'There is no peace in this transitory world. Think of death and be wise'. Finally, prayer had emerged as a very significant factor in his spiritual life.[10] It is not impossible that the roots of his later doctrine of Ādeśa, or revelation received by a spiritual figure from God, lay in these early experiences of spontaneous prayerfulness. Dissatisfaction with traditional Hinduism and the willingness to learn about Christianity also seem to foreshadow an interest in comparative religion which was to mark the later phase of his life.

III

Inasmuch as a move towards universal religion may be seen to involve a break with traditional Hinduism which held on to the

dogma of Vedic infallibility, the fact that Keshub Chunder Sen joined the Brahmo Samāj after it had been reactivated by Debendranath Tagore, (the son of Dwarkanath Tagore, who was a close associate of Rammohun Roy) in 1857, at the age of nineteen, is significant. The Bramho Samāj had, already by 1850, rejected the doctrine of Vedic infallibility[11] and arrived at the position 'that the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and other ancient writings were not to be accepted as infallible guides, that reason and conscience were to be supreme authority, and the teachings of the scripture were to be accepted only in so far as they have harmonized with the light within us'.[12] This did not mean, however, that the scriptures were discarded. Actually a compilation of scriptural extracts consistent with the teachings of the Samāj was prepared. What it did mean was that Vedic authority *per se* had been rejected. The connection between this step and the resultant universalism in the position of Keshub Chunder Sen, after the first schism occurred in the Brahmo Samāj over the wearing of the sacred thread[13] by Brahmins, is thus elaborated by Keshub Chunder Sen's colleague and biographer, P.C. Mozoomdar:

> Eclecticism had been the philosophy and faith of the Brahmo Samāj ever since the giving up of the Hindu Scriptures as infallible about the year 1850. Keshub inherited that position when he entered the institution years later and did all he could to confirm it by his studies, lectures, labours and reforms. But, in spite of all these eclectic professions, the Brahmo Samāj, under Debendranath Tagore, practically retained its Hindu character. When Keshub started on his independent career in 1866 he not only determined that the universality of Modern Hindu Theism in the Brahmo movement should be a reality, but that it should form the groundwork of all spiritual culture in that Church.[14]

Thus when Keshub Chunder Sen established the Brahmo Samāj of India in 1866 after the split (the original body now becoming known as the Ādi Brahmo Samāj):

> He called himself the Secretary of the new Samāj. But there was no constitution of any kind, no rules and no official head. Keshub declared that his Samāj required no human head, as God alone was its head. And soon the cosmopolitan character of the new church

was made manifest in the collection of texts, known as *Śloka Saṅ graha*, prepared for use in its services. It included passages from the scriptures of all religions – Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Chinese.[15]

IV

Keshub Chunder Sen had turned eclectic – but he had yet to turn universal. It is not quite certain as to what extent Keshub Chunder Sen's meeting with Rāmakṛṣṇa in 1875 acted as a catalyst in this connection. What transpired between these two men has been obscured by a mass of propaganda by both Keshubites and Ramakrishnaites, each trying to prove that it was their hero who influenced the other more. Even if Rāmakṛṣṇa's influence on Keshub is accepted marginally, its nature could be disputed. It may have made Keshub paradoxically both more Hindu and more universalistic. If it is true that under Rāmakṛṣṇa's influence, Keshub 'divided his disciples into four classes according to Hindu tradition', thus bringing about 'his fourfold classification of devotees under the headings of *Yoga* (Aghorenath Gupta), *Bhakti* (Bijoy Krishna Goswami and Trailokyanath Sanyal), *Jnana* (Gour Govinda Roy) and *Sheba*', all of whom he also gave courses of 'religious instruction according to their choice of discipline', in 1976; then it is also worth bearing in mind that in 1877 'he extended his classification to include other religions. The four areas of study were Hinduism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Buddhism'. The 'deeper understanding of Hinduism, and the eclecticism shown in such Hinduism classification could have been due to the influence of Ramakrishna, but they can just, as early be fitted into Keshub's own development'.[16]

Whether out of the internal dynamics of Keshub's life or due to Rāmakṛṣṇa's influence, it is clear that Kashub's interests were getting universalized. He vivified his interest in these other religions to the point of making his disciples play the role of the major figures of these religions in seminars and himself went on pilgrimage to religious places. As David Kopf has pointed out: 'This kind of existential experience was in its own way far more ambitious than similar undertakings by Ramakrishna. Through textual research, meditation, and careful reflection, Keshub sought an empathy with a given reformer that would erase the barriers of temporal and cultural distance'.[17]

While these developments were taking place, the Brahmo Samāj movement was shaken by a major division. The events leading up to it may be briefly recounted. In 1872, a civil marriage act[18] was passed with Keshub's support, which set the minimum age of the bridegroom at eighteen and that of the bride at fourteen. The Brahmos were supposed to abide by it. In 1878, however, Keshub consented to the marriage of his daughter to the prince of Cuch Behar, both of whom were under the stipulated age, justifying his consent on the basis of Ādeśa or divine guidance. Many, however, were not convinced and broke away to form a new group – the Sādhāraṇa Brahmo Samāj. It is important to mention this because this incident is not unconnected with the next stage in the development of the concept of universal religion in the life of Keshub Chunder Sen.

> This secession was a great blow to Keshub and he fell seriously ill. He recovered, however, and lived for six more years. His biographer tells us that, while Keshub was still in bed, they had a talk one evening about the future of Indian Theism as affected by the dissension in the Brāhmo Samāj. Keshub suddenly got up and said that 'there must be a great and unprecedented revival, if the Brāhmo Samāj is to tide over the present crisis'. Accordingly, when he recovered his strength, he worked in the spirit and manner of a revivalist. He wanted to make his church popular and comprehensive in all possible ways. For this purpose, he wished to bring all religions in the world under his banner, make himself the prophet of a new universal religion and introduce a rich and complex ritualism which would satisfy the mass mind. And he wished to select apostles whose duty would be to go out into the world and propagate the new faith. His Church should be no longer called the Brāhmo Samāj of India, but the Church of New Dispensation (Nava Vidhān), and it should be a consummation of all the religions of the world, something superior to Hinduism or Christianity or Islam. He, therefore, announced to the world that this church was the Church of New Dispensation and that he was the divinely appointed leader of it.[19]

The nature of this universal religion calls for some discussion. The New Dispensation or the Nava Vidhāna was proclaimed on the 7th of January, 1880.[20] Thus New Dispensation was also the third Dispensation, the Old Testament being the first and the New Testament the second.

> The old Testament has sung Jehovah's glory, the New Testament has sung the praise of Jesus, the son of God. Where is the Scripture that sings the name of the Hold Spirit? Seek it, my friends, in the Church of the New Dispensation, which is in India. Judaism has taught us the Father; Christianity has taught us the Son; the New Church will teach us the Holy Ghost. The Old Testament was the First Dispensation, the New Testament the Second; unto us in these days has been vouchsafed the Third Dispensation. Unite and amalgamate these three, and you have the Trinity Church of the World.[21]

V

What concept of universal religion is represented by the New Dispensation? Scholars have taken slightly differing views on this point. Sivanath Sastri, the historian of the Brahmo Samāj, enumerates some characteristic features of the preaching of Keshub Chunder Sen during this period. He says: 'The first thing noticeable was the conviction that he had received a new revelation or a new message from God, far transcending the limits of the old faith of the Brahmo Samāj. The cardinal feature of this new message was its unifying mission amongst the conflicting creeds of the world. But that unifying mission did not lie in discovering fundamental unity in their universal aspects only, but also in finding an element of truth not only in their spiritual teachings but also in their traditional developments and external manifestations'.[22]

He goes on to say that while 'In the previous history of the Brahmo Samāj, people grew up with the conviction that there were truths in all the religions, but the new conviction of Mr. Sen seemed to aver that all religions were true'. Indeed, Keshub Chunder Sen is himself quoted as declaring:

> Our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions; but that all the established religions of the world are true. There is a great deal of difference between the two assertions.
>
> The glorious mission of the New Dispensation is to harmonize religions and revelations, to establish the truth of every particular dispensation and upon the basis of these particulars to establish the largest and broadest induction of a general and glorious proposition.[23]

But the question remains: was Keshub merely asserting that all the religions of the world are true or *was he going a step further and trying to set up a universal church*?

Max Müller observed shortly after Keshub's death that

> two points only seemed to me of real importance in the teaching of his last years, first, the striving after a universal religion and the recognition of the historical superiority of Christianity as compared with the more ancient forms of faith. Keshub Chunder Sen rejoiced in the discovery that, from the first, all religions were but varying forms of one great truth. This was his pearl of great price. To him it changed the whole aspect of his life, and gave a new meaning to life.[24]

But this pearl of great price had always been much valued in India, and none valued it more than Rāmakṛṣṇa. Indeed,

> it was also just at this time that Ramakrishna had culminated his own experiments with unity and diversity in the major religions. His conclusion, according to later disciples, was that each religion was a different path to the same end. The best course of action – the opposite of Keshub's syncretism – was to stress the unity of purpose but to let the sleeping dogs of national religious distinction lie without being disturbed. By the end of that year, Sanyal, who had been composing songs about Hari for the mass processions, composed a new type of sangit that began 'Victory of Jesus, Moses,... and Gour, victory to Keshub Chandra, Synthesizer of all religions'. Keshub was evidently moving away from Ramakrishna's conclusion. *He was well on his way in the direction of pulling together Ramakrishna's many different paths into one path – the universal religion.*[25]

Thus to stop with saying that Keshub Chunder Sen preached 'all religions are but varying forms of truth' is to stop short. Even Max Müller, by implication, concedes this later, but at the cost or risk of involving Rammohun Roy and Debendranath Tagore, when he writes:

> If we call the separation of the Brahma-Samaj of India from the old Adi Brahma-Samaj, and again the separation of the Sadharan-Samaj from the Brahma-Samaj of India, a schism, we seem to condemn them by the very word we use. But to my mind these three

societies seem like three branches of one vigorous tree, the tree that was planted by Rammohun Roy. In different ways they all serve the same purpose, they are all doing, I believe, unmixed good, in helping to realize the dream of *a new religion for India, it may be for the whole world,* a religion free from many corruptions of the past, call them idolatry, or caste, or verbal inspiration, or priestcraft, and firmly founded on a belief in the One God, the same in the Vedas, the same in the Old, the same in the New Testament, the same in the Koran, the same also in the hearts of those who have no longer any Vedas or Upanishads or any Sacred Books whatever between themselves and their God. The stream is small as yet, but it is a living stream. It may vanish for a time, it may change its name and follow new paths of which as yet we have no idea. But if there is ever to be a real religion in India, it will, I believe, owe its very life-blood to the large heart of Rammohun Roy and his worthy disciples, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen.[26]

VI

What was the fate of Keshub's new universal religion? The fate of the universal religion was tied with that of Keshub and when Keshub died in 1884 the New Dispensation, though it did not die immediately with him, did not survive him for long. Keshub had 'deliberately aimed at establishing a universal church'.[27] In this Keshub did not succeed.[28] But if we ask: 'what happened to Keshub's disciples, each of whom after 1875 studied one major religion from primary sources? Did the seminars on comparative religion and the pilgrimages to the saints produce a new universalist outlook among the members of the Durbar?' then the answer may happily be given in the affirmative. Girish Chandra Sen, who had turned to the study of Islam, produced a Bengali translation of the Qu'rān which was completed in 1886 and whose 1936 edition was pronounced by Muslim scholars of East Bengal as 'thoroughly accurate historically, linguistically and theologically'.[29] Gour Govinda Roy, Keshub's choice for Hinduism, wrote a commentary in Sanskrit on the Bhagavdgītā and one of the first 'lives of Krishna, in the historical personality style of nineteenth century studies in the life of Christ'.[30] Aghorenath Gupta produced a commendable life of the Buddha, 'the first of its kind in Bengali or in any other modern South Asian language'.[31] Keshub's choice for Christianity seems to have been Protap Chandra Majumdar of whom it has

been said that 'after thirty years of missionary activity in Calcutta, the Reverend C.H. Dall's most important convert to Unitarianism was not Keshub, but Protap Majumdar',[32] who was present at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 which brought Vivekānanda into such prominence.[33] Thus 'the evidence suggests that most of Keshub's ascetic followers remained true to their scholarly quest long after their leader's demise and that ideologically they espoused a universalism characteristic of the New Dispensation Church'.[34] The ink of the scholar had turned out to be more powerful, if not sacred than, the blood of the martyr, if Keshub could be called one for sacrificing himself for his cause through incessant activity.[35]

5

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa (1836–86)

I

The meaning usually associated with the term 'universal religion' is that of 'one religion to which everybody subscribes'.[1] Similarly, a meaning often ascribed to universalism is 'the belief that all men will ultimately be saved'.[2] In Rāmakṛṣṇa we encounter the paradox of a person who did not believe in a universal religion, but who, at the same time, was a religious universalist – who believed that all human beings will be saved![3] But then, the position of Rāmakṛṣṇa on the question of universal religion, in its broadest connotation, is replete with such subtleties. The phenomenon of Rāmakṛṣṇa is perhaps the most significant in the context of the concept of universal religion in modern Hindu thought. And this significance is manifold.

II

Rāmakṛṣṇa was perhaps the only one among all the religious figures of modern India who actually claimed that he had had the direct experience of God. This sets him apart in a class by himself. This claim on the part of Rāmakṛṣṇa has become legendary. It was made to his would-be disciple Vivekānanda, who was in the habit of asking the religious leaders he encountered: 'Sir, have you seen God?'[4] Vivekānanda himself was to describe the incident subsequently as follows: 'I thought "Can this man be a great teacher?" – crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life:

"Do you believe in God, Sir?" "Yes", he replied. "Can you prove it, Sir?" "Yes", "How?" "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense". That impressed me at once. For the first time I had found a man who dared to say that he saw God . . . ".'[5]

The significance of Rāmakṛṣṇa's claim of having experienced God does not end with this statement. Rather, it begins with it, for he went on to claim:

> I had to practise all the religions once, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and I have walked the paths of the different denominations of Hinduism again – of Shakta, Vaishnava, Vedanta and other sects. And I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are travelling, only they are coming through diverse ways.[6]

The significance of this statement lies in the claim that it is *experiential* rather than *speculative* in nature. It is, of course, possible to question the authenticity of the claim, but the point is that no one, apart from Rāmakṛṣṇa, it would appear, is on record as making this claim on the basis of experience. That the nature of his experience, or of religious experience as such, may be questioned or be questionable is a distinct issue in and of itself. The point to note here is the uniqueness and ultimacy of the claim, whose authenticity, like that of all religious claims, may be doubted. It is remarkable, however, that even those who interpret Rāmakṛṣṇa's experiences psychologically rather than phenomenologically accept his 'universalism', although they attribute it to his 'Hindu religious heritage'.[7]

It would be tedious to document in detail Rāmakṛṣṇa's spiritual practices in relation to the various denominations within Hinduism and of religious traditions outside of it. This task has been performed painstakingly by his biographer chronologically,[8] and the data has been examined by several scholars analytically.[9] A statement elaborating Rāmakṛṣṇa's central position must suffice here:

> *God has made different religions to suite different aspirants, times and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion. One may eat a cake with icing either straight or sidewise. It will taste sweet either way.*
>
> *As one and the same material, water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third aqua, and*

> *another pani, so the one Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is invoked by some as* God, *by some as* Allah, *by some as* Jehovah, *and by others as* Brahman.[10]

III

Central to the concept of universal religion in the thought of Rāmakṛṣṇa is the idea of religious universalism. This idea, however, has to be understood carefully, especially in the light of such further statements as the following:

> God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.[11]

This statement, coupled with the earlier ones, tends to create a homogenized sense of God. This is a misleading impression and should be avoided. Rāmakṛṣṇa does *not* claim that all his experiences of Reality or God were the same; rather that it was the same reality which was experienced by him. It was not claimed by Rāmakṛṣṇa that the names of water are not different; it is rather water which is not different. Similarly, Rāmakṛṣṇa does not claim that ladder, bamboo, staircase and rope are the same; what they have in common is the fact that each is a different means of approach to the same reality, which again may not be experienced in the same way, although it is the same reality as pointed out earlier. Even more pointedly, it is not claimed that God is uniform – it is clearly stated that God is multiform; it is, however, the same God who assumes different forms. In this respect, he said:

> But dogmatism is not good. You have no doubt heard the story of the chameleon. A man entered a wood and saw a chameleon on a tree. He reported to his friends, 'I have seen a red lizard.' He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but red. Another person, after visiting the tree, said, 'I have seen a green lizard.' He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but green. But the man who lived under the tree said: 'What both of you have said is true. But the fact is that the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, and sometimes has no colour at all.'

> God has been described in the Vedas as both with attributes and without. You describe Him as without form only. That is one-sided. But never mind. If you know one of His aspects truly, you will be able to know His other aspects too. God Himself will tell you all about them.[12]

The same point applies not only to God as such but also to the Saviours. Rāmakṛṣṇa says:

> The Saviour is the messenger of God. He is like the viceroy of a mighty monarch. As when there is some disturbance in a far-off province, the king sends his viceroy to quell it, so wherever there is a decline of religion in any part of the world, God sends his Saviour there. It is one and the same Saviour that, having plunged into the ocean of life, rises up in one place and is known as Krishna, and diving down again rises in another place and is known as Christ.[13]

Here again it is not claimed that there is no difference between Jesus and Krishna – what is claimed is that it is the same Saviour who rises in these different forms.

IV

Such religious universalism generates a heady idealism. In the context of the actual reality of various religions, however, one must raise the question: how does one handle superstition or *error in religion*, on the one hand, and what to us appears *erroneous religion* on the other? Rāmakṛṣṇa accepts the fact that there might be error in religion but dismisses the fact that we may regard any religion as erroneous. The following remark addresses the first point:

> You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him. Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Babā' or 'Papā', but the babies can at best call him 'Bā' or 'Pā'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address

> him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many.[14]

And the second point he addresses as follows:

> What I mean is that dogmatism is not good. It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false. The correct attitude is this: My religion is right, but I do not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false. I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him. Kabir used to say: 'God with Form is my Mother, the Formless is my Father. Which shall I blame? Which shall I praise? The two pans of the scales are equally heavy.'
>
> Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Śāktas, Śaivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnānis of the time of the rishis, and you, the Brahmajnānis of modern times, all seek the same object. A mother prepares dishes to suit the stomachs of her children. Suppose a mother has five children and a fish is bought for the family. She doesn't cook pilau or kāliā for all of them. All have not the same power of digestion; so she prepares a simple stew for some. But she loves all her children equally.[15]

If such be Rāmakṛṣṇa's attitude, then does it mean that anything goes? His position seems to be that in general anything goes, but in relation to us, such relativism does not apply. The conclusion to be drawn from the insight that all religions are true, is twofold: (1) that my religion is true for me so it should be followed in earnest; and (2) as the other religion is also true for the one following it, it cannot be a matter of jest. In a word: there is no point in denouncing another religion.

> Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole hearted devotion. Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God Himself will correct those errors. Suppose a man has set put with a

sincere desire to visit Jagannāth at Puri and by mistake has gone north instead of south; then certainly someone meeting him on the way will tell him: 'My good fellow, don't go that way. Go to the south.' And the man will reach Jagannāth sooner or later.

If there are errors in other religions, that is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that. Our duty is somehow to visit Jagannāth.[16]

An important *corollary to not denouncing another religion is not renouncing one's own.*

This point comes across particularly forcefully in one of the earliest collection of his sayings, made by Max Müller.[17] Saying No. 337 reads:

Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mohammedan should follow Mohammedanism, and so on. For the Hindus the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best.[18]

Sayings 200, 247, 251, 272, etc. carry the same implication. This also seems to be the implication of the following parable: 'Once there lived a very pious Hindu who always worshipped the Divine Mother and chanted Her name. When the Mussalmāns conquered the country, they forced him to embrace Islām. They said to him: "You are now a Mussalmān. Say 'Allāh'. From now on you must repeat only the name of Allāh". With great difficulty he repeated the word "Allāh", but every now and then blurted out "Jagadambā". At that the Mussalmāns were about to beat him. Thereupon he said to them: "I beseech you! Please do not kill me. I have been trying my utmost to repeat the name of Allāh, but our Jagadambā has filled me up to the throat. She pushes out your Allāh."'[19]

One of the sayings from Max Müller's collection (No. 148) seems to represent the *reductio ad absurdum* of misunderstanding the doctrine of the multiplicity of paths.

148. Many roads lead to Calcutta. A certain man started from his home in a distant village towards the metropolis. He asked a man on the road, 'What road must I take to reach Calcutta soon?' The man said, 'Follow this road'. Proceeding some distance, he met another man and asked him, 'Is this the shortest road to Calcutta?' The man replied, 'O, no! You must retrace your footsteps and take the road to your left.' The man did so. Going in that new road for some distance he met a third man who pointed him out another

> road to Calcutta. Thus the traveller made no progress, but spent the day in changing one road for another. As he wanted to reach Calcutta he should have stuck to the road pointed out to him by the first man. Similarly those who want to reach God must follow one and one only Guide.[20]

Thus although all paths are valid, they are not valid for all.

> You must know that there are different tastes. There are also different powers of digestion. God has made different religions and creeds to suit different aspirants. By no means all are fit for the knowledge of Brahman. Therefore the worship of God with form has been provided.
>
> The mother brings home a fish for her children. She curries part of the fish, part she fries, and with another part she makes pilau. By no means all can digest the pilau. So she makes fish soup for those who have weak stomachs. further, some want pickled or fried fish. There are different temperaments. There are differences in the capacity to comprehend.[21]

The exhortation not to discriminate is not an invitation to be indiscriminate. For instance, Rāmakṛṣṇa accepted the validity of *vāmamārga*, a path characterized by antinomian tendencies, as a valid approach to the divine. When asked about such a group who, on account of worshipping Śakti as the supreme deity, are called Śāktas, he commented.

> Who should we hate them? Theirs is also a way to God, though it is unclean. A house may have many entrances – the main entrance, the back door and the gate for the *bhaṅgi* who comes to sweep the unclean places of the house. These cults are like this door. It does not really matter by which door one enters; once inside the house, all reach the same place. Should one imitate these people or mix with them? Certainly not![22]

V

Rāmakṛṣṇa's position of religious universalism, as a democratized version of universal religion, can be honed further. His teaching on

this point is summarized by D.S. Sarma as follows: '...to a man who has realized, all religions are paths that lead to the same goal. It is only those who have no religious experience that quarrel about the forms'.[23] One of the statements of Rāmakṛṣṇa he cites in support of this view is as follows: 'I find all men quarrelling in the name of religion. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Shaivas – all are quarrelling with one another. They never think that He who is called Krishna is also called Shiva that He Himself is named Adyashakti – the Primal Energy – Jesus or Allah! One Rama having a thousand names!'[24]

By now we are familiar with this view, but the way it is stated by D.S. Sarma enables it to be presented with greater penetration. Three distinct aspects of his statement can be identified: (1) the fact of realization; (2) the concept of a path; and (3) the identity of the goal. The significance of third aspect of the statement was critically clarified earlier; Nalini Devdas examines the first two in a similar fashion. She points out that

> the weight is on the first part of this statement. *He who has experienced Brahman* sees particular religions as paths leading to this Goal. Sri Ramakrishna is careful to say that this is not the viewpoint of the *sādhaka*. The correct attitude of mind for the *sādhaka* is to have faith that his chosen path will lead him to the Goal and to withhold judgement about other paths. 'It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false. The correct attitude is: My religion is right, but I do not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false. I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him.' Unless the *sādhaka* has conviction about his own religion he will not be able to follow it steadfastly.[25]

From the point of the view of the *siddha*, the realized, all goals are valid. From the point of view of the *sādhaka*, the aspirant, his or her own path is valid:

> In other words, Sri Ramakrishna interprets the statement: 'All religions are paths that lead to the same goal' existentially, not metaphysically. It is the practical discipline of *sādhanā*, not the philosophical question about the ultimate significance of particular religions, that concerns him. It is the *sādhaka* who *makes* his chosen religion a path to Brahman. On the other hand it must be

> recognized that *every religion* can be made a path towards the realization of Brahman. No religion must be condemned as philosophically false or rejected as useless in practical discipline.[26]

Similarly, the concept of the path itself must be understood with care. As Rāmakṛṣṇa himself pointed out: 'All doctrines are only so many paths; but *a path is by no means God himself*'.[27] Clearly then,

> This statement that all paths lead to the same goal needs careful interpretation. No path leads all the way to the goal. There is a point at which every particular religion with its creed and ritual must be abandoned, for the goal is a direct experience transcending theological discussions and religious creeds and symbols. To use a favourite analogy in the Indian tradition, the religion that the *sādhaka* has chosen is a ferry in which, with others he crosses the waters of *saṁsāra*. But there is a point at which he must leave the ferry and leap alone to reach the shore. Neither reason nor morality, nor any particular religion, can comprehend Brahman. In direct experience (*anubhava*)) Brahman is realized, and there is no more striving or questioning. When Swami Vivekānanda says, 'Religion is realization', he is speaking of the shore of Peace. Only those who have taken the leap know without a shadow of doubt that the shore is the same for all.[28]

In the light of the earlier discussion, the last line of the statement: 'Shore is the same for all' may preferably be rephrased as 'All arrive at different points of the same shore' because there are differences in religious experience. These are illustrated by the two accounts of the parable of the salt-doll. Once, when Rāmakṛṣṇa was asked whether any trace of ego was left in *samādhi*, he replied:

> Yes, generally a little of it remains.... In samadhi I lose outer consciousness completely; but God generally keeps a little trace of ego in me for the enjoyment of divine communion. Enjoyment is possible only when 'I' and 'you' remain.
>
> Again sometimes God effaces even that trace of 'I'. Then one experiences jada samadhi or nirvikalpa samadhi. That experience cannot be described. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but before it had gone far into the water it melted away. It became entirely one with the water of the ocean. Then who was to come back and tell of the ocean's depth?[29]

Nalini Devdas, however, points out that 'a different version of this story of the salt doll appears in Max Müller's book. These sayings of Sri Ramakrishna were collected and given to Max Müller by Swami Vivekānanda and, therefore, this vision deserves to be given due weight'.[30] It runs as follows:

> There are three kinds of dolls; the first made of salt, the second made of cloth, and the third made of stone. If these dolls be immersed in water, the first will get dissolved and lose its form, the second will absorb a large quantity of water but retain its form, while the third will be impervious to the water. The first doll represents the man who merged his self in the Universal and All-pervading Self and becomes one with it, that is the 'Mukta purusha'; the second represents a true lover or Bhakta, who is full of Divine bliss and knowledge; and the third represents a worldly man, who will not absorb the least drop of true knowledge.[31]

The conclusion to be drawn from this 'version of the story of the salt doll is that those who attain *samādhi do not have exactly the same experience.* The bhakta does not experience the complete loss of "I consciousness" as the jñani does'.[32] Here one might contrast the immersion of the salt doll with that of the bucket in a body of water. 'Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner was it in the water than it melted. Now who was to tell the depth?'[33] This applies to the ego of the Jñani. The ego of the Bhakta, however, is

> 'like a pitcher' – not a salt doll – and Brahman like the ocean – an infinite expanse of water on all sides. The pitcher is set in this ocean. The water is both inside and out; the water is everywhere; yet the pitcher remains. Now this pitcher is the ego of the devotee. So long as the ego remains, 'you' and 'I' remain, and there also remains the feeling, 'O God, Thou art the Lord and I am thy devotee; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. You may reason a million times, but you cannot get rid of it. But it is different if there is no pitcher'.[34]

VI

The foregoing discussion may refine the religious universalism of Rāmakṛṣṇa but it cannot confine it. For the most striking feature of

Rāmakṛṣṇa's version of 'universal religion' is its catholicity. It is on the basis of this catholicity that he distinguished Brahmoism – as discussed in the chapters on Roy, Tagore and Sen, from Hinduism. He said:

> The difference between the modern Brahmaism [of the Brāhmo Samāj] and Hinduism is like the difference between the single note of music and the whole music. The modern Brahmas are content with the single note of Brahman, while the Hindu religion is made up of several notes producing a sweet and melodious harmony.[35]

There is also a profounder difference between the two – especially between Keshab Chunder Sen's vision of universal religion and Rāmakṛṣṇa's religious universalism. In his *Modern Religious Movements in India*, J.N. Farquhar implies that Keshub Chunder Sen's idea of 'harmony of religions' was inspired by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa. But Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa could never accept this principle of 'harmony' of religious teachings on which the *New Dispensation* of Keshub Chunder Sen was based. He never brought together elements from different religions, nor attempted to recognize similarities in particular religious ideas presented by different religions. For him, the goal of religious endeavour, the direct experience of Brahman, is the single all-important concern.[36] Rāmakṛṣṇa's religious versatility, as assessed by his wife Śāradā Devi supports this view: 'It never seemed to me that he had practised the different religions with any definite motive of preaching the harmony of religions. Day and night he remained overwhelmed with the ecstatic thought of God.'[37]

His confidence in Hinduism as the eternal religion (*sanātana dharma*) was also derived from the catholicity he associated with it. As R.R. Diwakar points out, he had 'faith in Hinduism', a religion which is 'not exclusive but... all inclusive'.[38] He said:

> The eternal religion, the religion of the rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exist in this Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship – worship of God with form, and worship of an Impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths, the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults, will be there for a few days and then disappear.[39]

In this respect, modern scholars have identified an interesting convolution: that his teachings in respect of religious universalism were

even more catholic than as presented by the institutions inspired by him – the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Walter G. Neevel Jr offers the following conclusion, after comparing the teachings as presented by the official organs of the Rāmakṛṣṇa movement and Rāmakṛṣṇa's teachings in his own words:

> With regard to Rāmakrishna's teaching of the universal truth within all religions, the view that emerges from a consideration of Rāmakrishna's own ideas and practice turns out to be more inclusive in its recognition, more genuinely universalistic in its outlook than the theory of comparative religion that one finds in the official biographies. The view of world religions in those works can be compared in its fundamental idea with the classical Christian view of other religions as *praeparatio evangelica*. It has been the characteristic view of the Ramakrishna Mission that theistic religion does find and must find its consummation and final satisfaction in the trance of *nirvikalpa samādhi* in which all personality, human or divine, vanishes. In this light, those Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu traditions that are based upon the conception of a personal Deity are seen as being of positive but preparatory value. Rāmakrishna was less conditional in his acceptance. Possessed of strong personal preferences himself, he was nevertheless willing to acknowledge all forms of mysticism, theistic and non-theistic, personal and impersonal, as alternative ways to the realization of highest Reality.[40]

6

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Swami Vivekānanda (1863–1902)

I

Vivekānanda's concept of universal religion is characterized by a certain measure of fluidity. Sometimes he uses the term universal religion to emphasize the multiplicity of religions; sometimes the eternality of religion; sometimes the complementarity of religions; at other times, the humanity of religions; yet again, the harmony of religions; and yet again, the unity of religions. Sometimes he even discusses the possibility of Vedānta as a universal religion. Even this description does not exhaust the ways in which Vivekānanda works with the concept of universal religion, for sometimes he proceeds to identify it with his own version of an ideal religion as well.

Before we proceed to explore these seven dimensions of universal religion, as they appear in the works of Swami Vivekānanda, it might be helpful to recognize that Vivekānanda also uses the expression – and the concept it might embody – as it were – as fireflies in his utterances or writings, rather than as a steady point of light. For instance, he declares that 'the Vedas are the only exponent of the universal religion'[1] and bemoans the 'scene of almost infernal confusion' caused by 'breaking up piecemeal the one Eternal Religion of the Vedas (Sanātana Dharma)'[2] in India. In these contexts the use is too uncertain to yield theoretical clarity. In certain other contexts its use is more didactic than philosophical, as when he declares that 'doing good to others is the one great, universal religion'[3] or when he urges that students drawn from different religious folds should all be taught together.[4]

II

Universal Religion and the Multiplicity of Religions

It would be natural for anyone, thinking in terms of universal religion, to consider the multiplicity of religions as antithetical to such a concept, but Vivekānanda thought otherwise. He based his positive assessment of the multiplicity of religions and sects on historical and pragmatic grounds. With the single exception of the Zoroastrians,[5] he observed: 'This then is a fact in the present history of the human race that all these great religions exist and are spreading and multiplying.'[6] 'Christians are multiplying, Mohammedans are multiplying, the Hindus are gaining ground, and the Jews are also increasing....'[7] Should God have wanted only 'one of these religions to exist and the rest should die, it would have become a fact long, long ago'.[8] This is not merely a historical fact, it is a desirable state of affairs for 'any attempt to bring all humanity to one method of thinking in spiritual things has been a failure and always will be a failure'[9] because 'variation is the sign of life and it must be there'.[10] He approved of the growth of sects and even said: 'I pray that they may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings, and each will have his own method, his individual method of thought in religion.'[11]

It is apparent, then, that universal religion, in the thought of Vivekānanda, has nothing to do with uniformity in matters of religion; in fact, if anything, Vivekānanda celebrates variety and differentiation. For Vivekānanda, therefore, the concept of universal religion is fully consistent not only with the presence of many world religions but also sects which are 'multiplying all the time'.[12] 'The greater the number of sects, the more the chance of people getting religion. In the hotel, where there are all sorts of food, everyone has a chance to get his appetite satisfied. So I want sects to multiply in every country, that more people have a chance to be spiritual.'[13]

Universal Religion and the Eternality of Religion

Vivekānanda is not content to celebrate the presence of religious diversity in the present alone. He clearly states: 'I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all....'[14] He then goes on to identify with the religions of the present – with Islam, with Christianity, with Buddhism, with Hinduism,[15] and then goes on to declare:

> I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book – these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future![16]

Universal Religion and the Complementarity of Religions

Vivekānanda does *not* associate the idea of universal religion with a single set of beliefs and practices; on the contrary, he associates it with the idea of a multiplicity of sects. He associates such diversity of religious approaches not only with the present but also with the past and the future. The question arises: How does he visualize the relationship among these various sects, or religions, to use a more encompassing term? Vivekānanda himself raises the question pointedly: 'Are they contradictory? Do they contradict or supplement each other? – This is the question. I took up the question when I was quite a boy, and have been studying it all my life. Thinking that my conclusion may be of some help to you I place it before you. I believe that they are not contradictory; they are supplementary.'[17]

Vivekānanda develops this idea of complementarity along two lines. First, he points out that what is supplementary is essentially complementary in nature. Second, he draws attention to the fact that what appears contradictory may only be apparently so – hence the fact that religions change, or that religions differ, does not compromise the fact of their complementarity. The first argument is presented as follows:

> Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideas must be added to ideas. And this is the march of humanity. Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth – but it is never from

error to truth. The child may develop more than the father, but was the father inane? The child is the father plus something else. If your present state of knowledge is much greater than it was when you were a child, would you look down upon that stage now? Will you look back and call it inanity? Why, your present stage is the knowledge of the child plus something more.[18]

The second argument, which maintains that what appears as contradictory may be really complementary, is presented as follows:

Then, again, we also know that there may be almost contradictory points of view of the same thing, but they will all indicate the same thing. Suppose a man is journeying towards the sun, and as he advances he takes a photograph of the sun at each stage. When he comes back, he has many photographs of the sun, which he places before us. We see that not two are alike, and yet, who will deny that all these are photographs of the same sun, from different standpoints? Take four photographs of this church from different corners: how different they would look, and yet they would all represent this church. In the same way, we are all looking at truth from different standpoints, which vary according to our birth, education, surroundings, and so on. We are viewing truth, getting as much of it as these circumstances will permit, colouring the truth with our own heart, understanding it with our own intellect, and grasping it with our own mind. We can only know as much of truth as is related to us, as much of it as we are able to receive. This makes the difference between man and man, and occasions sometimes even contradictory ideas; yet we all belong to the same great universal truth.[19]

Vivekānanda can thus conclude: 'My idea, therefore, is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind.'[20]

Universal Religion and the Harmony of Religions

Even the irenic Vivekānanda, however, could not ignore the fact of religious conflict despite the putative complementarity of religions. He asks us to 'think of the horrors through which the world passed in olden times, when every sect was trying by every means in its power

to tear to pieces the other sects. History shows that. The tiger in us is only asleep, it is not dead. When opportunities come, it jumps up and, as of old, uses its claws and fangs'.[21] Hence the question cannot be met by merely asserting complementarity among religions; the question of harmony must be actively addressed.

According to Vivekānanda, the key to attaining this harmony consists in recognizing that each religion, like each nation, has 'a mission of its own to perform in [the] harmony of races'.[22] According to him, the 'fact that these old religions are living today proves that they must have kept their mission intact'.[23] In fact, he goes on to emphatically assert that 'they have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for. And it is splendid to study that mission'.[24]

A study of the various religions enables one to identify their splendid mission. In the case of Islam it is the 'practical brotherhood of all belonging to their faith'.[25] In the case of Christianity it is 'always trying to prepare... for the coming of the Lord, by trying to help others, building hospitals and so on'.[26]

Thus each religion 'represents a great truth; each religion represents a particular excellence – something which is its soul',[27] which constitutes its 'throbbing, beating, living heart' despite their 'mistakes ... difficulties... quarrels... [and] all the encrustation of forms and figures'.[28] Vivekānanda notes that 'the world is exercised in the latter part of this' – the nineteenth century – 'by the question of harmony'[29] and asks: 'will it ever come?'[30]

Vivekānanda examines the question carefully. He states that every religion consists of three parts: (1) mythology; (2) philosophy; and (3) ritual. Of each of these he asks the same question: Is there one universal mythology, philosophy or ritual? The answer invariably and predictably is: 'not yet'.[31] He summarizes his conclusion as follows:

> We find then that if by the idea of a universal religion it is meant that one set of doctrines should be believed in by all mankind, it is wholly impossible. It can never be, there can never be a time when all faces will be the same. Again, if we expect that there will be one universal mythology, that is also impossible; it cannot be. Neither can there be one universal ritual. Such a state of things can never come into existence; if it ever did, the world would be destroyed, because variety is the first principle of life. What makes us formed beings? Differentiation.[32]

This differentiation, combined with the excellence which characterizes each different religion, paves the way for religious harmony as distinguished from religious unity.

> Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, 'Brother, yours is an impossible hope'. Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.
>
> The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.
>
> Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.[33]

At times he also associates the name of Rāmakṛṣṇa, his Master, with the harmony of religions. After pointing out that while the philosophical sects of Hinduism combined 'wonderful liberalism'[34] with 'exclusiveness as regards caste'[35] and devotional sects produced an opposite combination of 'wonderful liberalism as to...caste'[36] with 'exclusiveness as regards religious questions',[37] Vivekānanda describes Rāmakṛṣṇa as possessing such 'noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence'.[38]

When one examines the question of universal religion *as such* in Vivekānanda, he seems to speak about it in three voices: (1) as something already existing; (2) as something which is already existing *in* either Hinduism as such, or in its form known as Vedānta or in the incarnation in Rāmakṛṣṇa, his Master; or (3) as something of an ideal, for realizing which he has his own plans. All these three strands are braided in his thinking on universal religion and it is our task to disentangle them.

Universal Religion and the Humanity of Religions

In one sense, Vivekānanda asserts, the universal religion is already here, it only needs to be discerned, just as all human beings already constitute humanity. The fact only requires recognition; it is already a fact.

In order to grasp this strand of Vivekānanda's thought, it is useful to harken back to his description of every religion as consisting of three parts: (1) mythology; (2) philosophy; and (3) ritual, and to remind ourselves of his conclusion that a universal philosophy or mythology or ritual cannot be identified. This conclusion leads him to ask: 'Where then is any universality? How is it possible then to have a universal form of religion? *That, however, already exists. Let us see what it is.*'[39]

These comments carry considerable significance. Vivekānanda is claiming that, in *some sense*, universal religion is already in existence and he wishes to show us precisely in which sense and in what way it is so. Vivekānanda presses into service here the concept of universal brotherhood, which we, in some ways, intuitively recognize, and extends it to the concept of universal religion. When we take into account the elusiveness of the argument, the subtlety of the analogy and the delicacy of the conclusion, it becomes imperative to present his argument in his own words. He begins by arguing for universal brotherhood:

> So far we see that it is hard to find any universal features in regard to religion and yet we know that they exist. We are all human beings, but are we all equal? Certainly not. Who says we are equal? Only the lunatic. Are we all equal in our brains, in our powers, in our bodies? One man is stronger than another, one man has more brain power than another. If we are all equal, why is there this inequality? Who made it? We. Because we have more or less powers, more or less brain, more or less physical strength, it must make a difference between us. Yet we know that the doctrine of equality appeals to our heart. We are all human beings; but some are men, and some are women. Here is a black man, there is a white man; but all are men, all belong to one humanity. Various are our faces; I see no two alike, yet we are all human beings. Where is this one humanity? I find a man or a woman, either dark or fair; and among all these faces I know that there is an abstract humanity which is common to all. I may not find it when I try to grasp it, to

> sense it, and to actualise it, yet I know for certain that it is there. If I am sure of anything, it is of this humanity which is common to us all. It is through this generalised entity that I see you as a man or a woman.[40]

Then he goes on to say:

> So it is with this universal religion, which runs through all the various religions of the world in the form of God; it must and does exist through eternity. 'I am the thread that runs through all these pearls', and each pearl is a religion or even a sect thereof. Such are the different pearls, and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them; only the majority of mankind are entirely unconscious of it.[41]

Universal Religion and Hinduism

When Vivekānanda speaks of a universal religion not as a *fact* which has gone unrecognized, but as an *ideal* which needs to be achieved, then he lays down a criterion: 'If there is ever going to be an ideal religion, it must be broad and large enough to supply food for all [the] various minds'.[42] Along with it, he lays down another criterion, virtually impossible to achieve historically: 'To make such a broad religion, we shall have to go back to the time when religions began and take them all in.'[43]

It seems, according to some reports, that he almost achieved this ideal in his addresses to the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in September 1893, for the *Boston Evening Transcript* reported that 'Vivekānanda's address before the parliament was broad as the heaven's above us, embracing the best in all religions as the ultimate universal religion – charity to all mankind, good works for the love of God, not for fear of punishment or hope of reward.'[44]

Vivekānanda, on his return to India, was feted for having projected Hinduism as a universal religion in accordance with the first criterion. On January 15, 1897, in Colombo, he was congratulated for having 'Proclaimed to the nations of Europe and America the Hindu ideal of a universal religion, harmonising all creeds, providing spiritual food for each soul according to its needs, and lovingly drawing it unto God'.[45] At Ramnad (Rameswaram) he was congratulated again, on January 25, 1897, for having 'Proclaimed to and convinced the cultured audiences in Europe and America that Hinduism fulfils all the requirements of

the ideal of a universal religion and adapts itself to the temperament and needs of men and women of all races and creeds'.[46]

Vivekānanda refers to a universal religion, in his response to the address of welcome at Almora, but although the setting is the sacred geography of Hinduism, the message transcends it. He says, with the Himalayas in mind:

> As our forefathers used to be attracted towards it in the latter days of their lives, so strong souls from all quarters of this earth, in time to come, will be attracted to this Father of Mountains, when all this fight between sects and all those differences in dogmas will not be remembered any more, and quarrels between your religion and my religion will have vanished altogether, when mankind will understand that there is but one eternal religion, and that is the perception of the divine within, and the rest is mere froth: such ardent souls will come here knowing that the world is but vanity of vanities, knowing that everything is useless except the worship of the Lord and the Lord alone.[47]

Vivekānanda goes on to say:

> Friends, you have been very kind to allude to an idea of mine, which is to start a centre in the Himalayas, and perhaps I have sufficiently explained why it should be so, why, above all others, this is the spot which I want to select as one of the great centres to teach *this universal religion*. These mountains are associated with the best memories of our race; if these Himalayas are taken away from the history of religious India, there will be very little left behind. Here, therefore, must be one of those centres, not merely of activity, but more of calmness, of meditation, and of peace; and I hope some day to realise it. I hope also to meet you at other times and have better opportunities of talking to you. For the present, let me thank you again for all the kindness that has been shown to me, and let me take it as not only kindness shown to me in person, but as to *one who represents our religion*. May it never leave our hearts! May we always remain as pure as we are at the present moment, and as enthusiastic for spirituality as we are just now![48]

It is curious that Vivekānanda thanks his hosts as a fellow Hindu, but the universal religion he wishes to propagate from there almost seems to transcend Hinduism.

However, Vivekānanda does seem to identify Hinduism as universal religion himself at times, or more precisely, with the form of it known as Vedānta. At one point he declares: 'I have become used to hear all sorts of wonderful claims put forward in favour of every religion under the sun. You have also heard, quite within recent times, the claims put forward by Dr. Barrows, a great friend of mine, that Christianity is the only universal religion. Let me consider this question awhile and lay before you my reasons why I think that it is Vedanta, and Vedanta alone that can become the universal religion of man, and that no other is fitted for the role. Excepting our own',[49] he goes on to point out, 'every one of the great religions in the world... is built upon... historical characters, but ours rests upon principles'.[50] Elsewhere, Vivekānanda makes the claim on behalf of Vedānta in even stronger terms: 'We may remark that as this is the unique position in India, our claim is that *the Vedanta only can be the universal religion, that it is already the existing universal religion in the world,* because it teaches principles and not persons. No religion built upon a person can be taken up as a type by all the races of mankind'.[51]

Such *obiter dicta* can be misleading, if not confusing. Clearly a distinction between the potential and the actual, between the latent and the patent is involved here, which may tend to be ignored if one subscribes to doctrines in which the cause is virtually identified with the effect.[52] Fortunately, we have access to Vivekānanda's own mature and detailed exposition of his views on the subject in his lecture, entitled, 'Is Vedānta the Future Religion?' delivered in San Francisco in April 1900, two years before his death. In this lecture he made the following salient points: (1) Vivekānanda argued that 'certain things are necessary to make a religion'.[53] These are three: (a) a book, i.e. scripture; (b) 'some person or persons' around which all the veneration of the followers 'twines around'[54] and (c) the belief that religion 'alone is true; otherwise it cannot influence people'.[55] Vedānta, (by which 'is always meant the Upanishads'[56]) does not fulfil these conditions. (2) Vivekānanda reached the 'conclusion, after travelling over a good part of the world and living in many races, and in view of the conditions prevailing in the world... that the present state of things', namely, fanaticism 'is going to continue, in spite of much talk of universal brotherhood'.[57] This implies that not just Vedānta, but any religion, did not have a bright prospect so far as the question of a universal religion was concerned. (3) Vivekānanda prophesied, somewhat remarkably, that 'Vedānta cannot become the religion of India'[58] and stood a much better chance of becoming the religion of

the USA 'because of democracy'.[59] He had earlier argued that there was a certain convergence between Vedānta and democracy.[60] (4) Vivekānanda did maintain that 'Vedanta formulates, not universal brotherhood but universal oneness'[61] and thus goes even further, that 'this Vedanta is everywhere, only you must become conscious of it';[62] that 'if Vedanta – this conscious knowledge that all is one spirit – spreads, the whole humanity will become spiritual', but he also wondered: '...is it possible? I do not know. Not within thousands of years. The old superstitions must run out'.[63] He also went on to note two factors, which, he thought, would impede, if not prevent, the outcome: (1) Although he had argued monistically, 'sometimes I think that there is some good in the dualistic method; it helps many who are weak',[64] and many are weak,[65] and (2) 'Although Vedanta is the oldest philosophy in the world, it has always become mixed up with superstitions and everything else'.[66] In other words, Vedānta may be the *eternal* religion but it was unlikely, that, in the near future, it was going to be the *manifest universal* religion.[67] It remained potentially and ideally universal in the sense that it upheld the unity of all existence, but whether such unity would ever be realized in practice defied prediction. In terms of a universal religion, when the term is understood broadly, he does allude to some of Rāmakṛṣṇa's teachings, as in the following exhortation:

> I do not care in what light you understand this great sage, it matters not how much respect you pay to him, but I challenge you face to face with the fact that here is a manifestation of the most marvellous power that has been for several centuries in India, and it is your duty, as Hindus, to study this power, to find what has been done for the regeneration, for the good of India, and for the good of the whole human race through it. Ay, long before ideas of universal religion and brotherly feelings between different sects were mooted and discussed in any country in the world, here, in sight of this city, had been living a man whose whole life was a Parliament of Religions as it should be.[68]

The active rehearsal of Hinduism, Vedānta, and Rāmakṛṣṇa's teachings as the universal religion is followed by an eventual reservation. In the instance of Rāmakṛṣṇa this became apparent when he was asked: 'In what sense is Shri Ramakrishna a part of this awakened Hinduism?' He replied: 'This is not for me to determine. *I have never preached personalities.* My own life is guided by the enthusiasm of this

great soul; but others will decide for themselves how far they share in this attitude. Inspiration is not filtered out to the world in one channel, howsoever great. Each generation should be inspired afresh. Are we all not God?'[69]

Vivekānanda took great pains to demonstrate that Hinduism, as a religion, was founded on principles, as distinguished from those based on persons, namely, the 'historical religions'. One can clearly see this point at work in his answer given above. How could he claim to base a universal religion of Rāmakṛṣṇa, when he had consistently challenged the universal claims of religions based on a person? Hence there were logical limits to pursuing this approach towards universal religion. For the case for Vedānta as a universal religion, Vivekānanda saw historical limits. He did feel that it had a claim on the modern world,[70] but he also wondered, as mentioned earlier: 'If Vedanta... spreads, the whole of humanity will become spiritual. But is it possible? I do not know. Not within a thousand years. The old superstitions must run out'.[71] As for Hinduism as a universal religion, he saw it as spreading the *gospel* of universal religion, as distinguished from being the universal religion. Moreover, although its 'freedom of the Ishta is obviously a principle big enough to accommodate the world',[72] as an interviewer noted, part of its insight consisted of the fact that not just Hinduism, and the paths within it, but all other religions also led to God.[73]

The most balanced statement on the point of universal religion by Vivekānanda also seems to be consistent with this general position and is perhaps truly representative of his position. Departures from it seem to be in the nature of rhetorical or polemical excesses. It runs as follows:

> You hear claims made by every religion as being the universal religion of the world. *Let me tell you in the first place that perhaps there never will be such a thing, but if there is a religion which can lay claim to be that, it is only our religion and no other,* because every other religion depends on some person or persons.[74]

The argument anticipated in the last line has already been alluded to.

It seems that Vivekānanda is tempted to identify either Hinduism, or Vedānta or Rāmakṛṣṇa's teachings with *universal* religion because these come closest to satisfying his criterion for an *ideal* religion, namely, that it 'must be broad and large enough to supply food for

all...[the] various minds, all [the] various types'.[75] However, they come close but not close enough, for Vivekānanda has his own ideas on this point.

Universal Religion *à la* Vivekānanda: The Theory

One may now focus directly on Vivekānanda's concept of universal religion, as distinguished from his views regarding Hinduism, or some form of it, as filling that bill. This is best done by reverting to the trichotomy, in terms of which Vivekānanda displayed the inability of any one religion to become the universal religion. Every religion possesses (1) mythology; (2) philosophy; and (3) ritual, and none belonging to any recognized religion is universally acceptable. In fact, the rituals of one are abhorred by the other. To the Christian the worship of Śivaliṅga is phallic worship, and to the Hindu the Eucharist is cannibalistic. Moreover, what one religion regards as historical another regards as mythological, and so on. Nor is this necessarily undesirable – this is an important insight insisted on by Vivekānanda. He says:

> What then do I mean by the ideal of a universal religion? I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all; for I know that this world must go on working, wheel within wheel, this intricate mass of machinery, most complex, most wonderful. What can we do then? We can make it run smoothly, we can lessen the friction, we can grease the wheels, as it were. How? By recognising the natural necessity of variation. Just as we have recognised unity by our very nature, so we must also recognise variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes. We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing.[76]

He illustrates this point with two examples. The first consists of different photographs of the sun taken from different distances. They look different but they are, however, photographs of *one* and the same sun. (Vivekānanda uses this illustration often.)[77] The second consists of water being fetched in different vessels: 'Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from a lake. One has a cup, another a jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case naturally takes the form of the

vessel carried by each of us. He who brought the cup has the water in the form of a cup; he who brought the jar – his water is in the shape of a jar, and so forth; but, in every case, water, and nothing but water, is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion; our minds are like these vessels, and each one of us is trying to arrive at the realisation of God'.[78]

This idea of the *self-same object* appearing differently – the sun or water, is very important for Vivekānanda, for in both the illustrations the objects are ultimately replaced by God. Vivekānanda concludes the first illustration by saying:

> And yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at the different stages of his progress. Even so is it with the Lord. Through high philosophy or low, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism, every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has, is a vision of Him and of none else.[79]

Similarly, Vivekānanda concludes the second illustration by remarking: 'God is like that water filling those different vessels, and in each vessel the vision of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet He is One. He is God in every case. *This is the only recognition of universality that we can get*'.[80]

Vivekānanda is quite emphatic on this point: that this is the only recognition of universality we can get *in theory*.[81] The point is important, for when it comes to *practise* the situation is far more amenable in terms of universal religion. There is divergence in Vivekānanda's views on a universal religion in *theory*, in relation to Hinduism, for instance, when he veers towards Vedānta and a universal religion in *practice*, which he associates ideally with a synthesis of the four Yogas, as will become apparent in what follows.

Universal Religion *à la* Vivekānanda: The Practice

Vivekānanda builds his model of a universal religion in three steps, after stating that he is devising a practical plan, and after concluding a theoretical discussion of the issue in general.[82] We should remind ourselves here of Vivekānanda's criterion for a universal religion: that it must cater to all kinds of minds.

Vivekānanda begins by dividing all human beings for practical purposes into four classes: (1) the active man, the worker; (2) the emotional man; (3) the mystic; and (4) the philosopher.[83] He then refers back to his criterion that 'a religion, to satisfy the largest proportion of mankind, must be able to supply food to all these types of minds'.[84]
Vivekānanda proceeds to argue that in this respect the 'existing sects' are 'one-sided'.

> This is the existing condition of religion, the existing condition of things. What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic, and equally conducive to action.[85]

Vivekānanda then dilates on this point at some length, and must be cited *in extenso* to convey the full range and impact of this thought:

> And this combination will be the ideal of the nearest approach to a universal religion. Would to God that all men were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion, and of work were equally present in full! That is the ideal, my ideal of a perfect man. Everyone who has only one or two of these elements of character, I consider 'one-sided'; and this world is almost full of such 'one-sided' men, with knowledge of that one road only in which they move; and anything else is dangerous and horrible to them. To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions in my ideal of religion. And this religion is attained by what we, in India, call *Yoga* – union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and Higher Self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga. This is a Sanskrit term, and these four divisions of Yoga have in Sanskrit different names. The man who seeks after this kind of union is called a Yogi. The worker is called the Karma-Yogi. He who seeks the union through love is called the Bhakti-Yogi. He who seeks it through mysticism is called the Raja-Yogi. And he who seeks it through philosophy is called the Jnāna-Yogi. So this word Yogi comprises them all.[86]

This passage is followed by a detailed exposition of Rāja-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga and Jñāna-Yoga.

This synthesis of some of the Yogas,[87] or of all four of them,[88] Vivekānanda also attributes to Rāmakṛṣṇa and here lies a possible link between his brand of universal religion or rather *ideal* universal religion and the heritage of Rāmakṛṣṇa.

III

It is clear that Vivekānanda's thoughts on universal religion are characterized by complexity, and perhaps even a measure of ambiguity. It is, however, possible to get a handle on its complexity by viewing it in terms of the interplay of such concepts as those of diversity and unity, complementarity and harmony, reality and ideality and theory and practice, and to *exaggerate* the ambiguity involved.[89]

Two points seem to stand out clearly in Vivekānanda's views about universal religion: (1) that he had a fairly clear-cut criterion which a universal religion should meet, that it 'ought to satisfy all humanity' and many of his observations, when viewed in the light of this criterion, really reflect varying assessments of the degree to which this criterion was met in any given situation and (2) that his discussion of universal religion, especially ideal universal religion, is not entirely devoid of a Hindu orientation. Nevertheless, this Hindu orientation is not Advaitic in character, so far as Vivekānanda's thoughts on universal religion are concerned, as has sometimes been mistakenly assumed, on account of what he says in his discussion of the possibility of Vedānta in this context. This is what he may have wished for but this is not what he settles for. He settles for (1) a synthesis of the four Yogas paradigmatically achieved by Rāmakṛṣṇa and (2) for the kind of religious universalism associated with Rāmakṛṣṇa; 'who incarnated and experienced and taught this wonderful unity which underlies everything, having discovered it alike in Hinduism, in Islam, and in Christianity'.[90] He wrote to Miss Mary Hale on 17th June, 1900: 'Religion is that which does not depend upon books or teachers or prophets or saviours, and that which does not make us dependent in this or in any other lives upon others. In this sense Advaitism of the Upanishads is the only religion. But saviours, books, prophets, ceremonials, etc. have their places. They may help many as Kali worship helps me in my *secular work*. They are welcome.'[91]

It seems, however, that Vivekānanda did wish to go a step beyond Rāmakṛṣṇa. In his lecture of April 8, 1900 in San Francisco on 'Is Vedanta the Future Religion' he said towards the end: 'I am the

servant of a man who has passed away. *I am only the messenger.* I want to make the experiment. The teachings of Vedanta I have told you about were never really experimented with before'.[92]

If Rāmakṛṣṇa was the messenger, then how did Vivekānanda understand his message? And what was the nature of the experiment he was carrying out?

Vivekānanda understood the message of Rāmakṛṣṇa at several levels. First of all, he understood it as establishing the validity of all religions by his own example. As he explained to Sister Nivedita: 'It must have been the training under Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. We all went by his path to some extent. Of course it was not so difficult for us as he made it for himself. He would eat and dress like the people he wanted to understand, take their initiation, and use their language. "One must learn", he said, "to put oneself into another man's very soul". And this method was his own! No one ever before in India became Christian and Mohammedan and Vaishnava by turns!'[93]

Next, he understood it as reconciling various sects and schools within Hinduism, especially non-dualism and dualism. Vivekānanda bemoans the fact that the Vedic insight: 'That which exists is One; sages call It by various names' tends to be forgotten.

> Yea, except a very few learned men, I mean, barring a very few spiritual men, in India, we always forget this. We forget this great idea, and you will find that there are persons among Pandits – I should think ninety-eight percent – who are of opinion that either the Advaitist will be true, or the Vishishtadvaitist will be true, or the Dvaitist will be true; and if you go to Varanasi, and sit for five minutes in one of the Ghats there, you will have demonstration of what I say. You will see a regular bull-fight going on about these various sects and things.[94]

Vivekānanda, however, does not stop here. He goes on to say:

> Thus it remains. Then came one whose life was the explanation, whose life was the working out of the harmony that is the background of all the different sects of India. I mean Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. It is his life that explains that both of these are necessary, that they are like the geocentric and the heliocentric theories in astronomy. When a child is taught astronomy, he is taught the geocentric first, and works out similar ideas of astronomy to the geocentric.[95]

Finally, he understood it as Advaita. In this respect, certain observations of Vivekānanda about Rāmakṛṣṇa are extremely significant. First, Vivekānanda does not allow the distinction between Brahman (*nirguṇa*) and Īśvara to get blurred. He says:

> Shri Ramakrishna used to consider himself as an Incarnation in the ordinary sense of the term, though I could not understand it. I used to say that he was Brahman in the Vedantic sense; but just before his passing away, when he was suffering from the characteristic difficulty in breathing, he said to me as I was cogitating in my mind whether he could even in that pain say that he was an Incarnation, 'He who was Rama and Krishna has now actually become Ramakrishna – but not in your Vedantic sense!'[96]

Second, he points out that he belongs to the Inner Circle of Rāmakṛṣṇa's followers; and was in fact the centre of this circle:

> He used to love me intensely, which made many quite jealous of me. He knew one's character by sight, and never changed his opinion. He could perceive, as it were, supersensual things, while we try to know one's character by reason, with the result that our judgments are often fallacious. He called some persons his Antarangas or 'belonging to the inner circle', and he used to teach them the secrets of his own nature and those of Yoga. To the outsiders or Bahirangas he taught those parables now known as 'Sayings'. He used to prepare those young men (the former class) for his work, and though many complained to him about them, he paid no heed. I may have perhaps a better opinion of a Bahiranga than an Antaranga through his actions, but I have a superstitious regard for the latter. 'Love me, love my dog', as they say. I love that Brahmin priest intensely, and therefore love whatever he used to love, whatever he used to regard! He was afraid about me that I might create a sect, if left to myself.[97]

Then he points out that Rāmakṛṣṇa taught him non-dualism (*advaita*).

> Devotion as taught by Nārada, he used to preach to the masses, those who were incapable of any higher training.
>
> *He used generally to teach dualism. As a rule, he never taught Advaitism. But he taught it to me. I had been a dualist before.*[98]

The *experiment* he refers to seems to relate to the propagation of Advaita Vedānta as a possible universal religion of the future, reservations notwithstanding, while simultaneously transmitting the other aspects of Rāmakṛṣṇa's teaching. It is this element of Advaitic experimentation, which takes Vivekānanda's concept of universal religion beyond the religious universalism of Rāmakṛṣṇa's, and imparts to it an ambiguity referred to earlier.

In terms of the astronomical metaphor employed by him earlier, he was not content to let the universe of discourse of universal religion rest with the recognition that both the heliocentric and geocentric theories were necessary in this discourse; he also wished to promote the realization that 'when it comes to finer points of astronomy, the heliocentric will be necessary, and he will understand it better'.[99]

To conclude: in the context of universal religion in the *present and practical terms* Vivekānanda remained close to Rāmakṛṣṇa's general position; in the context of universal religion in *theoretical and futuristic terms*, he tried to experiment by making what was esoterically delivered to him, available to all. It might be said that if, in religious matters, the teachings of Rāmakṛṣṇa may be reduced to the motto: 'Individualistic preference but no exclusion': the teachings of his disciple Vivekānanda could be reduced to the motto: 'Advaitic preference but no exclusion'.

7

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Svāmī Dayānanda Sarasvatī (1824–83)

I

The discussion of the concept of universal religion in the life and thought of Svāmī Dayānanda Sarasvatī presents unique difficulties. It is a widely held view that his life and thought represent the very antithesis of the concept of a universal religion. My studies, however, over the years have led me in a different direction. Given the diffidence one feels in challenging a position which has virtually gained the status of gospel truth, I would initially urge that Svāmī Dayānanda Sarasvatī was an ecumenist; at least his face, in that sense, was turned towards the concept of universal religion, if he did not march towards it. Those readers whose sympathies I am able to arouse might even be willing to accept that, in fact, he also took a few steps (quite a few steps) in that direction.

The only scholar I know who anticipates my position in any measure is Hugh Tinker. I therefore commence by citing him:

> To Madame Blavatsky, Dayananda wrote: 'As night and day are opposed to each other, so are all religions opposed to one another'. In saying this, he was claiming a supreme role for the purified Hinduism of the Vedas. Yet his attitude (and that of his followers, e.g. Lala Lajpat Rai) was dualistic. While challenging Christianity and Islam, he often appeared more in accord with fellow-reformers and believers of other faiths than with secular, debased co-religionists. It appears that he contemplated a unified reform movement, and with that in mind he met leaders, including Keshab Chandra Sen

and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1877: nothing came of this, because Dayananda insisted that all must accept the authority of the Vedas as the basis of common action. This phenomenon – a desire for harmony, for a common cause, and the insistence that all non-Hindu co-operation must include an acceptance of the Hindu matrix – was to characterise the national movement in India during the years ahead.[1]

To recapitulate: It is generally held that Dayānanda Sarasvatī was parochial in outlook in comparison with the other major Hindu religious figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is one of the purposes of this chapter to indicate that this impression, though widespread, is inaccurate, and that Dayānanda was actually quite ecumenical in his approach.

Dayānanda has the reputation of being the more conservative and parochial among the religious figures of modern India. He fell out with the Brahmo Samāj and the Theosophical Society over the issue of Vedic infallibility.[2] The Ārya Samāj, which he founded, is considered intolerant by the Ramakrishna Mission[3] and Dayānanda was accused by Mahatma Gandhi of trying to 'make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal faiths on the face of the earth', namely, Hinduism. Many scholars of modern Indian history tend to concur in varying degrees.[4] Is this impression correct?

The following procedure will be adopted to critically assess the accuracy of this impression. First, the term ecumenism will be defined and distinguished from similar terms. Second, the need to distinguish between the views of Dayānanda Sarasvatī and the Ārya Samāj, which he founded, will be emphasized. As a third step, the factors which serve to explain the current impression will be identified and critically examined. Next, evidence which serves to modify the prevailing view will be presented. In a final section the significance the reassessment of Dayānanda's position vis-à-vis the concept of universal religion will be highlighted.

II

The term ecumenism may be defined either in a Christian or para-Christian context. In a Christian context it has been defined as 'striving for unity amid diversity'[5] but obviously a para-Christian definition is required here. In other words, following Raimon Panikkar,

one must distinguish between what he calls (1) Christian ecumenism; and (2) ecumenical ecumenism, this latter being defined as '*Dharma-samanvaya* or harmonization (convergence, coming together) of all dharmas or religions, that is of all traditions dealing with human ultimacy. I repeat that *samanvaya* does not have to mean sameness, but it conveys the hope that today's cacophony may be converted into a symphony tomorrow'.[6] Such a hope was certainly shared by Dayānanda, as will become obvious later. It is, however, the distinctions drawn around the term ecumenism by Peter Staples which clear the semantic deck for pinpointing why exactly Dayānanda has been misperceived in this context. According to Staples:

> Ecumenism is an (institutionalized) ideology. Ecumenicity is an attitude (so the psychological level cannot be excluded from the ultimate explanation). Ecumenism usually presupposes ecumenicity: but it would appear that ecumenicity is not always coupled with ecumenism in the specific mode of an ideology. Ecumenics is a scientific discipline which overlaps theology, history and all of the social sciences: including both psychology and social psychology. It is also a practical discipline: i.e. the uniting of divided churches. The ecumenical movement is a cluster of official and unofficial groups organized to pursue ecumenical goals. The ecumenical process is a social-historical process (not deterministic!) which includes both ecumenicals (whose attitude to ecumenism and/or ecumenicity is positive) and anti-ecumenicals (whose attitude is obviously negative), both of whom can be either organized or unorganized. The ecumene in its weak sense is the Christian World or the total Christian constituency. In its strong sense it is the religious world. And in its strongest, i.e. most 'utopian' sense, it is the total world community.[7]

The ecumenical elements in Dayānanda's life and thought should not be confused with ecumenicity, ecumenics, the ecumenical movement, or the ecumenical process. Ecumenism was identified as an approach by Panikkar; it is more closely associated with institutionalized ideology by Staples. I have employed the word in the sense used by Panikkar but have also utilised the distinction between ecumenism and ecumenicity drawn by Staples as helpful in the context of Dayānanda. Ecumenism refers to the cognitive aspect and ecumenicity to the affective. It will become clear as the essay proceeds that Dayānanda was clearly cognitively ecumenical and that the doubts

about his ecumenical approach have to do with ecumenicity – the affective side. Because he did not refrain from criticizing religions when necessary (including his own), this created mixed feeling about him,[8] and the misleading impression that he did not seek religious harmony. It was a harmony of 'purified' religions which he sought.

III

It is important to distinguish between the positions of Dayānanda Sarasvatī and the Ārya Samāj which he founded. It must be recognized that the subject of this paper is Dayānanda and not the Ārya Samāj. This distinction is of considerable importance. The position of the founder around whom a movement crystallizes can differ from the position of the movement itself. For instance, Walter Neevel Jr has demonstrated that the position of the Ramakrishna Mission on the matter of religious tolerance is *less* tolerant than that of Rāmakṛṣṇa himself.[9] This point is of special relevance in the present context as it was *not* obligatory for the members of the Ārya Samāj to accept Dayānanda's interpretation of the Vedas,[10] although its acceptance as revelation was obligatory.[11] Dayānanda himself remained only an ordinary member of the Samāj like any one else, although his advice was naturally widely sought given his eminence.[12]

The significance of distinguishing between the position of Dayānanda and that of the Samāj becomes clear in the context of Islam. Kenneth W. Jones notes that 'Dayānanda's attacks on Islam made no mention of the historic clash between Islam and Hinduism, nor did he emphasize contemporary points of conflict between the two religious communities. Typically he limited himself to scriptural exegesis. Yet implicit in his comments lay a consciousness of Islamic political domination. Later Samāj writers would make explicit the tie between Islamic doctrine and historical conflict, finally relating both to communal tensions of nineteenth-century Punjab'.[13] The passage creates the impression that all the Samāj did was to make manifest what was latent in Dayānanda. But Dayānanda's attitude was *in fact* moderate as demonstrated by Jordens, who writes:

> Dayānanda did not spare Islam the harsh condemnation he had meted out to Hinduism and Christianity. But, nevertheless, it is significant that we do not find in this chapter those bitter, sarcastic remarks that feature in his attack on the Christians; his attitude

here is in general more moderate. This fits in with his behaviour during his visit to the Punjab: the missionaries were his prime target, whereas the Muslims were only incidentally attacked.[14]

Dayānanda's situation in this regard is cognitively similar to Gandhi's, who criticizes Islam for its narrowness and proneness to violence,[15] but is more critical of Christianity. It is perhaps not widely known that, in Lahore, Dayānanda's host was a Muslim doctor, Khan Bahadur Rahim Khan, and that the local Ārya Samāj was started in his house. In Amritsar the Samāj was started in the house of another Muslim, Miyan Jan Muhammad.[16]

The difference between Dayānanda and the Samāj on the role of polemics also needs to be understood. For Dayānanda its role was therapeutic; for the Samāj in its later history, provocative. Dayānanda recognized that people found his criticisms disturbing but he compared them to the purgative process which 'first causes uneasiness sometimes nausea, but when the body gets purged and the elemental disorder subsides, the patient feels great relief'.[17]

Although a comparative study of the two editions (1875, 1884) of the Satyārtha Prakāśa indicates that Dayānanda became more nationalistically militant towards the end of his life,[18] he never abandoned his ecumenical attitude. The parable cited at the end of this paper, for instance, appears in the second edition. The Ārya Samāj became a major factor in Punjab politics in the pre-Independence period, and has also been a factor in Indian politics in the post-Independence period. The Janata Party, which defeated Mrs Indira Gandhi's Congress in the Parliamentary elections in 1977, is said to have had no less than a hundred elected members who had either direct or indirect links with the Ārya Samāj. But as distinguished from the Ārya Samāj, Dayānanda, while he attempted to unite the Hindu rulers politically,[19] remained universal in his outlook. As he states in the Satyārtha Prakāśa:

> Though I was born in Aryavarta (India) and still live in it; yet just as I do not defend the falsehoods of the religions prevailing in this country but expose them fully; in like manner I deal with the religions of others countries and their supporters. *I treat the foreigners in the same way as my own countrymen so far as the elevation of the human race is concerned.* It behoves all men to act likewise.[20]

IV

One may now identify and then examine the factors responsible for the impression that Dayānanda was intolerant of other faiths. The following reasons are usually adduced to establish the parochial rather than the universal nature of Dayānanda's outlook:

(1) He preached intolerance of other religions, in sharp contrast to the attitude of religious tolerance characteristically associated with Hinduism by its modern spokesmen. This universalism is seen as an extension to other religions of the tolerant attitude the Hindus hold towards sects within Hinduism.[21] Dayānanda attacked *both* the sects within Hinduism as well as religions other than Hinduism.[22]
(2) A logical corollary of the religious tolerance of Hinduism is its non-proselytizing nature. Dayānanda compromised this by advocating the reconversion of former Hindus, who had become Christians or Muslims, to Hinduism by launching the Śuddhi movement.[23]
(3) He did not know English and was thus not directly exposed to Western education and culture. This generates the suspicion that his outlook had not been broadened by contact with the West, which prevented him, for example, from regarding Western, that is British Rule over India as providential.[24]
(4) By ultimately accepting only the Saṁhitā portion of the Vedas alone as true revelation, he narrowed the scriptural foundations of Hinduism. In this respect his disregard of the Bhagavadgītā is particularly held to have been unwise.[25]
(5) He advocated such outmoded practices as *niyoga* which 'is simply sexual intercourse without marriage', for the relief of widows and widowers.[26]
(6) The activities of the Ārya Samāj aggravated Hindu-Muslim tensions in the Punjab.[27]

A critical examination of these arguments shows that they are misleading:

(1) Mahatma Gandhi, whose attitude to other religions is regarded as paradigmatic, criticized other religions,[28] as Rammohun Roy before him.[29] Vivekānanda, who propagated the idea of Hindu tolerance with such vigour, criticized Christians severely on

occasion.[30] All three could be equally scathing in their attacks on fellow Hindus. Tolerance has never been confused with approval in neo-Hinduism. One must wonder why Dayānanda should be singled out as an exception when he is not.[31]

(2) It is true that Rāmakṛṣṇa and Mahatma Gandhi were opposed to conversion in any form – either to or from Hinduism. Dayānanda shared their opposition to conversion from Hinduism but differed in advocating reconversion to Hinduism. But there again Vivekānanada held the same view though he did not implement it.[32] In practice, however, and in a way, he went a step further and converted even Westerners to Hinduism, who were not even former Hindus! If Vivekānanda can still be considered a universalist, why not Dayānanda?

(3) It is true that Dayānanda did not know English but he 'wanted people to study English'.[33] He appreciated Western science and technology to the point of finding them in the Vedas.[34] He applauded the virtues of Englishmen[35] and was exposed to modern ideas during his stay in Calcutta.[36] Besides, if he could arrive at advanced social views, notwithstanding his traditional background, there seems to be no reason, *prima facie*, why he could not also similarly arrive at a liberal religious position.

(4) Scholars have tended to overlook the fact that Dayānanda has on occasion cited from the Bhagavadgītā approvingly in his Satyārtha Prakāśa.[37] He was fully aware of that text and also utilized it, though he denied it the status of a revelation. But the Hindu tradition itself denies it that status.[38]

(5) Dayānanda's view on *niyoga* no doubt appear bizarre to us, but so do some ideas of Rāmakṛṣṇa and Mahatma Gandhi on sex and marriage.[39]

(6) Although it is true that the activities of the Ārya Samāj may have exacerbated Hindu-Muslim relations in the Punjab, it is often overlooked that Dayānanda *himself* was careful *not* to confront the Muslims in the Punjab as 'his main targets outside of Hinduism were the Christian missionaries'.[40]

That he was on friendly terms with Sir Syed Ahmed Khan also needs to be taken into account.[41] Students and scholars prone to conclude that Dayānanda was hostile to Muslims in particular, and possessed an unforgiving temperament in general, may wish to reflect on the following incident which took place in Anupshahar, UP. Dayānanda was administered poison in a betel-leaf by a Brahmin

who was arrested by the Muslin Tahsildar, 'an admirer of Swamiji'[42] but Dayānanda refused to press charges with the remark: 'Why should I part with goodness when evil minded people do not give up their wickedness'.[43] It should also be noted that at one stage in his activities he discouraged the *śuddhi* of Muslims[44] presumably because he perceived the Christians as the common enemy. Some Muslims contributed to his cow-protection schemes[45] and he drew inspiration from the life of the Prophet, as when he remarked after the poor response to the Samāj in Multan: 'When Islam was started, there were only two members – the Prophet and his wife. Today Islam has hundreds of millions of followers'.[46]

V

Now that some of the erroneous impressions have been placed in perspective, it may be pointed out that the modern fashion for 'dialogue', strange though it sounds, can be traced back to Dayānanda. At this stage it can be clearly stated that while Dayānanda may or may not be universalistic in his approach, he certainly approved of 'dialogue'.

To begin with, he tried to organize a meeting of the various Hindu sects in 1877 and generally looked for 'consensus not controversy' with fellow Hindus.[47] This attitude of fraternization with those within the Hindu fold also found expression in his dealings with the leaders of 'alien religions'. The fact that Vivekānanda attended the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 is well known. It is not equally well known that 'Far from being intolerant, Dayananda Sarasvati was one of the first Indian reformers of the modern age to plead for a free and full exchange of ideas between representatives of different religions. He convened a conference for this purpose at Delhi in 1877. The conference was attended by Keshab Chandra Sen and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, representing Brahma Samaj and Islam respectively. The meeting yielded no practical results, but it paved the way for other such conferences and conventions in the future'.[48] This meeting coincided with the Durbar at Delhi at which Queen Victoria assumed the title 'Empress of India' during the vice-royalty of Lord Lytton. As Jordens has observed, this attempt, coupled with a prior one to convene a universal council of Hinduism, serves to demonstrate that 'the hope for a supra-sectarian form of collaboration and organization' – not confined to Hindus – 'retained a hold on

Dayānanda's mind, an idea that strengthened rather than weakened in the coming years'.[49] We see Dayānanda's concern with ecumenism here in both its weak and strong senses as defined by Staples.

The truth of the matter is that one can go a step further and claim that Dayānanda believed in promoting a universal religion. He documented his own views on the matter of universal religion in a statement called *My Beliefs and Disbeliefs* (*Svamantavyāmantavya*), which takes the form of an appendix to the Satyārtha Prakāśa. Both the introduction and the conclusion of this document testify to Dayānanda's universal aspirations. A part of the opening statement of the document runs as follows:

> That faith (*dharma*) alone is really worthy of credence which is accepted by the *āpta*, i.e., the persons who are true in word, deed and thought, and who promote public good, and are impartial and learned. Similarly, what is discarded by such men (i.e. the *āpta*) is unworthy of belief and is not authoritative. It is not at all my purpose to found a new system or religion. My sole object is to believe in what is true, and help others to believe in it, and to reject what is untrue and help others to do the same. If I had been partial, I would have captioned any one of the religions prevailing in India, but *neither I accept the demerits of different faiths whether Indian or alien, nor reject what is good in them.*[50]

And towards the end Dayānanda says:

> In short, I accept universal maxims: for example, speaking of truth is commended by all, and speaking of falsehood is condemned by all. I accept all such principles. I do not approve of the wrangling of the various religions against one another for they have, by propagating their creeds, misled the people and turned them into one another's enemy. My purpose and aim is to help in putting an end to this mutual wrangling, to preach universal truth, *to bring all men under one religion* so that they may, by ceasing to hate each other and firmly loving each other, live in peace and work for their common welfare. May this view through the grace and help of Almighty God, and with the support of all virtuous and pious men, soon spread in the whole world so that all may easily acquire righteousness, wealth, gratification of legitimate desires and attain salvation, and thereby elevate themselves and live in happiness. This alone is my chief aim.[51]

In reading this passage it should be borne in mind that the expressions righteousness, wealth, gratification of desires and salvation do not represent an artificial lumping together of diverse benign sentiments but are the English rendering of what are considered the four legitimate goals of human endeavour in Hindu thought, namely, *dharma, artha, kāma,* and *mokṣa.* It should also be borne in mind that these are called *puruṣārthas,* that is, sought by *all human beings.* Dayānanda here presses Hindu axiology in support of his universalistic stance.

Thus, it turns out that the one neo-Hindu figure who is most often dubbed as parochial or narrow is a figure who actually aspired for the formation of a single universal religion. Almost all other prominent figures of neo-Hinduism explicitly disown any aspiration of a universal religion for humanity, rather they seek the universal element in the religions of mankind, or speak in favour of universality in general. But Dayānanda aspired for a universal religion. This one universal religion Dayānanda visualized as consisting essentially of three fundamental beliefs: (1) belief in one God, to be worshipped non-idolatrously; (2) belief in a universal moral code; (3) belief in the Saṁhitā portion of the Vedas as God's revelation.[52] The first two beliefs are common currency in talk about universal religion, it is the third belief which bears the unique imprint of Dayānanda.

The Vedas are accepted as revelation by the Hindus in general. There is, therefore, to begin with, nothing striking in Dayānanda's acceptance of them as such. But the real situation is far more complex. Even from a Hindu standpoint (from which Dayānanda's view of Vedic revelation was Naiyāyika in nature if Mīmāṁsika in intensity) he departed from tradition in accepting *only* the Saṁhitā portion of the Vedas as truly revealed. But from the point of view of this paper what is more striking is the fact that Dayānanda made Vedic revelation the cornerstone of his universal religion. He achieved this result in the following manner: (1) by declaring that the Vedas were 'universal and meant for all mankind' and not just for the male members of the three higher *varṇas;*[53] (2) by maintaining that the linguistic fact of their being in Sanskrit established their universality;[54] 'If they had been couched in the language of a particular country, they would not have been universal; and if they had been revealed in all languages, the number would have been unlimited;' (3) by demonstrating that 'other religious books, such as the Bible, Koran, and the like, are not from God'.[55] in the 13th and 14th chapters of the Satyārtha Prakāśa;

and (4) by demonstrating that the Vedas are from God because 'the very content of the Vedas also proves their divine origin. They possess four qualities totally beyond the powers of any human author. They are absolutely free from any bias, they treat adequately *all* branches of knowledge, they are devoid of anything that may offend morality and their arrangement of words, meanings and construction is so tight and perfect that they can yield the totality of knowledge'.[56] It is true that Dayānanda did not succeed in founding such a universal Vedic religion but then the religious history of humanity suggests that, as achievement does not always coincide with aspiration, one should beware of using success as a yardstick of sincerity. To conclude: contrary to the common impression, the universalistic element is clearly evident in the life and thought of Dayānanda. He wanted the whole world to embrace a single universal religion.[57] He was thus universalistic in both its senses: in the ecumenical sense of bringing religions together on a common ethical platform; and in the missionary sense of bringing the world together in common adherence to Vedic religion.

At this point two objections could be raised: (1) Dayānanda's emphasis on the priority and superiority of the Vedic revelation renders his position exclusive and therefore unecumenical; (2) his insistence on a universal ethic is merely superficial and formal rather than substantive. To answer the first objection, one only need refer back to the three fundamental beliefs of Dayānanda: (i) in one God; (ii) in a universal moral code; and (iii) in Vedic revelation. The last is unique, much like the Christian and Islamic revelations, and constitutes the exclusive element of Dayānanda's teaching. But the first two he holds in common with Christianity and Islam. These would constitute the ecumenical element of his teaching in this context. After all, ecumenism seeks unity amid diversity; the third element of his teaching provides the diverse element and the first two provide the elements of unity with those other religions.

The importance of Dayānanda's insistence on a universal ethic can be clearly seen in a Hindu-particular context, in the course of the discussion in his chapter on ethical conduct.[58] The point at issue is the ethical consequences of crossing the oceans, untouchability and so on, and Dayānanda comments: 'For the virtuous, excellent conduct consists in the abandonment of sins such as covetousness, enmity, injustice, false speech etc. and the cultivation of affection free from rancour, altruism, nobility etc. And grasp this fact as well that virtue pertains to the soul and duty; if we perform good deeds then no

pollution can arise from travelling to different countries and continents...'.[59] Hence Dayānanda's endorsement of a universal ethical code needs to be taken seriously.

VI

The ecumenical significance of the life and work of Dayānanda may now be examined. To me this significance is sixfold.

First, he is often regarded as a non-ecumenist. This should alert us to the danger of misrepresentation when it comes to religious figures, for, as this chapter has endeavoured to demonstrate, it would be at best misleading and at worst scurrilous to brand Dayānanda as a bigot. Could it be that some other religious figures, Indian and non-Indian, have suffered a similar fate?

Second, Dayānanda seems to illustrate the danger not only of misrepresentation in general, as already pointed out, but also the particular danger of Western misrepresentation of non-Western religious leaders who do not appear in the trappings of Western culture. The Western society in modern times has tended to view itself as liberal and progressive and when it encounters a religious figure such as Dayānanda in the nineteenth century and Khomeini in the twentieth, who appear relatively immune to Western influences, the temptation to label them as regressive *merely* on that account may need to be resisted.

Third, the case of Dayānanda illustrates the danger of being blinded by the polemical pyrotechnics which religious leaders might indulge in, or by their overenthusiastic statements of their own mission. The fact that Jesus speaks of appearing with a sword in his hand does not mean that statements about beating them into ploughshares become irrelevant. The mission of religious leaders needs to be seen steadily and to be seen as a whole, before any judgement is passed on its ecumenical possibilities.

Fourth, the case of Dayānanda underscores the need to look at the intrareligious attitudes of religious leaders along with their interreligious attitudes. The two may not always be the obverse and the reverse of the same coin but often come from the same mint. Dayānanda attacked certain Hindus sects with the same vigour with which he attacked non-Hindu religions; and just as he sought a common foundation for the various Hindu sects he did so for the various religions as well.

Fifth, the case of Dayānanda demonstrates the problem that any claim for finality on the part of a revelation must pose for ecumenical dialogue. The Muslim often wonders why the Jews and the Christians do not accept the Qur'ān; after all, it only fulfils the revelations disclosed to them earlier by the *same* God. The case of Dayānanda reverses the profile of the problem: why is not everyone accepting the primeval Vedic revelation? But the problem is the same and ecumenism has to take it into full account.

Finally, the example of Dayānanda seems to strengthen the case for an ecumenism based on a universal ethic. It seems that while religions may differ sharply in beliefs and in certain specific practices shaped by these beliefs, they seem to share a common humanitarian ethic. This fact was emphasized by Dayānanda and it seems that his emphasis was well-placed.[60]

To conclude, there can be little doubt regarding the ecumenical content of Dayānanda's life and thought which he himself expressed in the form of a parable, paraphrased as follows by Jordens:

> A man in search of the true religion asked the advice of a pandit, who brought him to an assembly of a hundred sects and religions. He consulted them all, and everywhere he was told the same story: our religion is the true one, the other ninety-nine are false. In despair he returned to the pandit who told him: 'Take heed only of those matters in which they all agree. Is there such a thing in which they all believe?' The man answered, 'Yes, there are some, e.g. they recognize one god and worship him, they teach that truth should be spoken and not untruth, and that one should have mercy on the poor. Then the pandit said, 'Those are matters of religion, follow them. The rest are only misleading lies.'[61]

VII

In this context, the extent to which the circumstances surrounding the death of Svāmī Dayānanda (on 30 October, 1883, the day of the Diwali festival) have been ignored is surprising if not striking. It is often, by implication, treated as a case of natural death.[62] J.T.F. Jordens, after presenting what could be mistaken for a sanitized account, writes: 'It is claimed that the poison had been administered to the Swami at Jodhpur, on the instigation of the Maharaja's favourite Nanni; she is said to have felt her position threatened

by the Swami's presence. This tradition is very strong among the Aryas . . .'.[63] After weighing the matter he concludes, 'All one can do is to accept the possibility of the truth of the tradition'.[64] Stephen N. Hay is less hesitant on the point and after referring to the revolutionary nature of Svāmī Dayānanda's teachings concludes:

> Such revolutionary teachings evoked the wrath of the orthodox and numerous attempts were made on Dayānanda's life. His great physical strength saved him from swordsmen, thugs, and cobras, but the last of many attempts to poison him succeeded. Like John the Baptist, he accused a princely ruler of loose living, and the woman in question instigated his death by having ground glass put in his milk.[65]

Some recent biographies recount the last days of his life in more detail.[66] The conspiracy theory finds it poignant expression at the hands of Arya Samajists as follows:

> Who had given him poison? Evidently the cook or the servant, who brought him milk and the poisoned sugar. Tradition names the criminal as Jagan Nath, others think it was Kallu or Kallua or may be Dhaul Misher, a fellow from Shahpura state. One version is that Nannhi bribed the cook through the agency of the *mali* (gardener). Swamiji became an unsuspecting victim of a well-laid conspiracy. The cook was bribed, his accomplices or contacts were purchased, perhaps the attending physician also got his due – some others too might have been bribed to cover the crime – each to play his ignoble part. Our hero lay dying.[67]

Others have not hesitated to lay out the 'bare facts'.[68] The thick pall of conspiracy is however pierced by two striking facts: that in all probability the Svāmī was administered powdered glass mixed with milk-sugar and that he died in the following manner:

> At 5:30 in the evening the Swami recited some Vedic mantras and the gayatri, in a clear voice. He remained in meditation for some time. At 6 p.m. he took a deep breath. That was his last one; and his soul departed. He said: 'O Almighty God you have performed a good lila [sport]. This is thy will, this is thy will. Let thy will be done'.[69]

The similarity between the last words of Jesus and Dayānanda is striking, although to place them on the same pedestal might seem at least odd if not far-fetched. Yet precisely such a comparison has been suggested by Śrī Aurobindo. Of course Gandhi seems more in the same league as Christ but the interesting point to consider is whether public martyrdom invests one with a brighter halo than a private one, especially if the following account is correct:

> There was a consensus amongst the attending doctors that poison was mixed in the hot milk served to Swamiji on the night of 20 Sept. The probable version was that the cook Pt. Jagan Nath did the mixing at the instigation of a person who had animosity with Swamiji. Fearing that cook might be harassed by investigations into the odious crime by the authorities of Jodhpur, Swamiji gave Pt. Jagan Nath a sum of Rs. 500 to help him hide himself in Nepal which was then beyond the bounds of the Indian police. The cook had confessed his guilt to Swamiji.[70]

If this is true then the emphasis placed by Dayānanda on a universal morality as a component of any universal religion stands out in a bolder, if also bloodier, relief. We remember the Jesus who rebuked the Pharisees but we remember that Jesus much more who forgave his enemies nailed down to the cross. We remember the polemicist Dayānanda no doubt, but if he provided funds for his killer to make his getaway, we will have to remember him more for that. Crusading courage is a special gift but self-sacrifice is a universal virtue.

8

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

I

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is perhaps the most universal among modern Hindu thinkers. Count Keyserling said of him: 'he is the most universal, the most encompassing human being I have met'.[1] It might not be unfair to suggest, therefore, that the religious universalism of Rabindranath Tagore is a specific instantiation of his more encompassing universalism, almost bewildering in its variety.

> A lesser mind than Tagore's would have lost its bearings through the sheer weight of its own raw material; a lesser imagination would have felt dizzy at the very prospect of working out the latent possibilities of such diverse promptings. The unique achievement of Tagore is that he was able to assimilate so many streams of thought, follow them for over six decades, view them without pedantry or undue passion, and fuse them into a comprehensive, well-rounded world-view. And all this he did while engaged upon creative work of the highest order in poetry, drama, fiction, music and painting.[2]

The fact is that Rabindranath himself was at least driven to despair and feared being strangled by the rich diversity of his own sensitivity, as when he wrote: 'My faculties are like rebellious animals drawing a carriage. If they were all horses, I could somehow control them. But how can a charioteer harness and control at the same time a horse, a

camel and an elephant'.[3] However, V.S. Narvane is emphatic that we need not despair: 'But the point is that he *did* control them, that he succeeded in driving the carriage over hill and plain, over rough terrain and smooth. And he could do so because he had fashioned a wonderful harness – the universal principle of harmony and balance'.[4] Narvane further observes that 'this quest for harmony, becomes all the more pronounced in Tagore's thought because his philosophy is the philosophy of a poet. As a poet he is not content with giving intellectual assent to the idea of harmony in the midst of discord, unity at the root of multiplicity. He *feels* that harmony, and is impelled to give it creative expression'.[5] Here then is a ray of hope amidst the encircling gloom produced by the thickening cloud of his prolificity, so much so that it 'is yet too early to say how many scores of volumes all his writings in Bengali and English, if collected, would run to'.[6] No doubt 'Rabindranath is the Leonardo da Vinci of our [Hindu] Renaissance. His versatility is extraordinary. He is poet, dramatist, novelist, actor, composer, educator, philosopher, painter and prophet. But, first and foremost, he is of course a poet. His position as a world-poet is now universally recognized ...'.[7] And when Tagore acknowledges that 'my religion is essentially a poet's religion'[8] our spirits are buoyed. We hope that in discussing the religious universalism in Rabindranath Tagore we won't be paralysed by being confronted by a trackless treasure, whose riches are too blinding to behold. If the interrelatedness of things, which the poet himself celebrates, is kept in mind, perhaps one could propose three successive, if interrelated, stages in which the ground could be covered. One could first survey the diversity of the sources of his universalism; then his universalizing influence on Hinduism and then conclude with his version of the universal religion.

II

V.S. Naravane identifies the following 'main determinants'[9] of Tagore's philosophy: (1) the Upaniṣads; (2) the theistic-humanistic tradition as represented by (a) the Vaiṣṇava poets of Bengal; (b) the Bauls of Bengal; (c) the Sufi saints; (d) Kabir and Dadu and (e) the poets of the Bhakti movement as a whole; (3) Buddhism; (4) Western, including Christian influence; and (5) the 'influence of his own milieu'. In fact Tagore himself spoke of three 'upheavals' that moulded his thought. They were:

> The revolution in religion, initiated by Ram Mohun Roy, which 'led to the reopening of the channels of spiritual life'; the literary revolution, led by Bankim Chatterji, which liberated Indian literature from the dead weight of custom and made it a living vehicle of inward experience; and the socio-political revolution which not only heralded a new faith in India's heritage but also helped the Indian mind to redefine its age-old notions in terms of modern ideas of freedom, social well-being, equality, collective endeavour and international cooperation.[10]

Several points need to be made regarding the influence of the Upaniṣads and of Buddhism on Tagore. In relation to the Upaniṣads, Naravane notes that 'Tagore was able to get more out of the Upaniṣads than most of his contemporaries...'.[11] And he was able to do so 'because his approach to the scriptures was refreshingly different'.[12] He eschewed both Indian and Western preconceptions in the matter by treating them neither as the proof texts of a *particular* school of thought nor as pervaded by life-denial. They were sources of inspiration and hence universal rather than parochial or negative in significance, so that, as Louis Renou notes, he could see in the famous Vedic *gāyatrī mantra* itself 'the form of words through which it is possible to bring into human consciousness the fundamental unity of the universe, and to realize the unity of all lives in God',[13] to say nothing of the Upaniṣads.

Similarly, Tagore distinguishes, as in the case of Upaniṣads, between two aspects of Buddhism: the impersonal, more manifest in its Theravāda form and the personal, more evident in Mahāyāna Buddhism. We know of his preference for the personal dimension. However, in relation to Buddhism in general his 'main concern was to emphasize the positive element and to correct the one-sided evaluation of Buddhism as a doctrine of sorrow and annihilation'.[14]

In the present context Tagore's attempt to overcome the difference between Hindu and Buddhist thought is significant, which as such 'was never composed in the long history of Indian thought, and has persisted in some form even to this day',[15] and specially when the universal impulses which inform his thinking are kept in mind. He declared:

> To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the Spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them both in my own life

and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality.[16]

III

Tagore took a more universalistic stand in relation to Hinduism, both personally and doctrinally. D.S. Sarma points out that 'Tagore, though originally belonging to the Adi Brahmo Samaj of his father [Devendranath Tagore] never considered himself outside the pale of Hinduism, as some misguided members of the Brahmo Samaj do'.[17] Moreover, although like his father he favoured the personal god over the impersonal, he disregarded rather than discarded the latter.[18]

We have already seen the generous interpretations of the Hindu scriptures Tagore has to offer, highlighting their inclusiveness. He even contrasts the Āśramas of India, which nestled in the bosom of nature, with the city walls of Athens and Rome which shut it out.[19] He founded the Śāntiniketana to manifest the ancient ideal that the universe itself is a partial manifestation of the spirit. His poetry is characterized by devotional mysticism and nature mysticism. The former is universalized by him by dispensing with 'all mythological symbols; and sectarian names and forms'[20] and further by de-linking devotion with renunciation of the world, which seems to characterize much of medieval devotional poetry. In this, however, Tagore was being different rather than original. For 'his originality consists not in his poems of devotional mysticism, exquisite flowers of the heart as they are, but in those of nature mysticism'.[21] Here he breaks what is practically new ground in 'our [Hindu] religious literature'.[22] Even sorrow is raised into the yellow light of the golden orb of the universal sun, as it were, and made radiant and the whole universe is seen as steeped in bliss (*ānanda*) so much so as to claim that 'any fragment of a cake is as sweet as the whole cake'.[23] The famous Upaniṣadic text (Taittirīya II.7), according to which the whole universe rises, moves and sets in bliss, is universal in its import. In terms of Tagore's thought the point may be paraphrased thus:

To partake of this joy, to take delight in this music or dance of creation we have to attune not only our minds, but also our hearts. Our attitude towards the universe should be one of deep adoration.

> Truth is the object not only of knowledge, but also of devotion. Jnana is not a mere feat of the intellect, it is supreme effort of the heart as well. For mere unaided intellect will see things only in their isolation and miss the deeper truth of their unity. The things of the world are like the letters in a book. They are both separate and united. The letters are separate in themselves, but they are united in the meaning they convey. When the individual letters claim all our attention, as when a beginner is spelling out words, they fatigue us. But, when they combine into words and sentences and convey an idea, they give us joy. When the idea is conveyed, the letters and words do not vanish, they remain in their place, but become a transparent medium through which the meaning is seen. We lose sight of their isolation, we only feel their unity. Similarly, as long as we see things in their separateness only our knowledge is fragmentary and superficial. It is only when we see them in their unity, in one divine harmony, that we know the joy and love that lie behind them.[24]

It is clear that Tagore is a 'prophet of humanity', that his 'love of humanity is the outcome of his spirituality'; for him Hinduism and humanism become identical, as do poetry and philosophy and the sacred and the secular. According to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'Perhaps no living poet was more religious, and no man of religion was more poetical'[25] while according to Louis Renou his 'work, though entirely secular by intention, is filled with religious feeling through and through'.[26] The transition from universalized Hinduism of this section to universal religion of the next may now be made through the following summation of D.S. Sarma:

> Thus does Tagore, both in his mystical poetry and in his philosophical writings, reiterate and emphasize the immemorial teachings of the Hindu Scriptures, viz., (1) that the universe in which we live is a partial manifestation of the infinite Spirit, (2) that there is no hard and fast line between Nature and man or between man and God, (3) that evil and suffering are not absolute realities, but only the temporary expedients of the evolving spirit, (4) that the Absolute Spirit is all ineffable joy and love, (5) that true knowledge is that which perceives the unity of all things in God, and (6) that the emancipation of man consists in his absolute self-surrender in service and love. And, finally, being a prophet of Modern India, which is no longer isolated from the rest of the world, he is able to view all

the religions of the world, as parts of one whole – the religion, as he calls it, of Man the Eternal. Every Hindu would echo his words, when he says that 'the civilizations evolved in India or China, Persia or Judaea, Greece or Rome are like several mountain peaks having different altitude, temperature, flora and fauna, and yet belonging to the same chain of hills'.[27]

IV

In order to grasp Tagore's concept of the universal religion as the Religion of Man, one must clearly understand what Tagore means by man and what he means by religion.

According to Tagore, human beings possesses a unique faculty which sets human beings apart from other beings. 'This faculty is our luminous imagination, which in its higher stage is special to man'.[28] Elsewhere he describes it as 'consciousness',[29] 'spirit of man'[30] but, above all, as 'personality':[31] 'Physical evolution sought for efficiency in a perfect communication with the physical world; the evolution of man's consciousness sought for truth in a perfect harmony with the world of personality'.[32] Tagore celebrates this fact of our being human beings in this sense as possessing personality; he celebrates this human solidarity as illustrating an application of the concept of 'personality'; as a principle which enables the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts:

> We know something about a system of explosive atoms whirling separately in a space which is immense compared to their own dimension. Yet we do not know why they should appear to us a solid piece of radiant mineral. And if there is an onlooker who at one glance can have the view of the immense time and space occupied by innumerable human individuals engaged in evolving a common history, the positive truth of their solidarity will be concretely evident to him and not the negative fact of their separateness.[33]

In fact Tagore does much more. He celebrates our humanity not as an abstraction but as a felt reality, and, on the same principle, as a living 'personality'.

> There are those who will say that the idea of humanity is an abstraction, subjective in character. It must be confessed that the

concrete objectiveness of this living truth cannot be proved to its own units. They can never see its entireness from outside; for they are one with it. The individual cells of our body have their separate lives; but they never have the opportunity of observing the body as a whole with its past, present and future. If these cells have the power of reasoning (which they may have for aught we know) they have the right to argue that the idea of the body has no objective foundation in fact, and though there is a mysterious sense of attraction and mutual influence running through them, these are nothing positively real; the sole reality which is provable is in the isolation of these cells made by gaps that can never be crossed or bridged.[34]

This is sound morality, but Tagore soon imparts to it a religious dimension by maintaining that man's religion, which in its beginning had a 'cosmic background of power', 'came to a higher stage when it found its background in the human truth of personality'.[35]

What does this personality consist of? Tagore provides several examples. 'When life came out it did not bring with it any new materials into existence. Its elements are the same which are the materials for the rocks and minerals. Only it evolved a value in them which cannot be measured or analysed'.[36] This value reaches its acme in the human person:

Of all creatures Man has reached the multicellular character in a perfect manner, not only in his body but in his personality. For centuries his evolution has been the evolution of a consciousness that tries to be liberated from the bounds of individual separateness and to comprehend in its relationship a wholeness which may be named Man. This relationship, which has been dimly instinctive, is ever struggling to be fully aware of itself. Physical evolution sought for efficiency in a perfect communication with the physical world; the evolution of Man's consciousness sought for truth in a perfect harmony with the world of personality.[37]

That which is not found separately in the parts but emerges in a whole, this 'surplus' constitutes personality. The appearance of this surplus lies embedded in the relationship of the parts, therefore,

Relationship is the fundamental truth of this world of appearance. Take, for instance, a piece of coal. When we pursue the fact of it to

> its ultimate composition, substance which seemingly is the most stable element in it, vanishes in centres of revolving forces. These are the units, called the elements of carbon, which can further be analysed into a certain number of protons and electrons. Yet these electrical facts are what they are, not in their detachment, but in their inter-relationship, and though possibly some day they themselves may be further analysed, nevertheless the pervasive truth of inter-relation which is manifested in them will remain.[38]

He goes on to say: 'We do not know how these elements, as carbon, compose a piece of coal; all that we can say is that they build up that appearance through a unity of inter-relationship, which unites them not merely in an individual piece of coal, but in a comradeship of creative co-ordination with the entire physical universe.'[39]

Tagore uses the example of the ordinary table to identify two aspects of this personality. The first is that, what is not, appears. The table is nothing but a swirling system of subatomic particles but it appears[40] as a *solid* object. Similarly, a human being is merely an assembly of material elements in which life or consciousness appears, which does not individually belong to them, but somehow arises in their relatedness. Once having arisen, it similarly perceives the universe. It is consciousness, itself a 'surplus' which perceives the table which too is a 'surplus' of the whole over the parts. One 'personality' is now in touch with another.

> The table that I am using with all its varied meanings appears as a table for man through his special organ of senses and his special organ of thoughts. When scientifically analysed the same table offers an enormously different appearance to him from that given by his senses. The evidence of his physical senses and that of his logic and his scientific instruments are both related to his own power of comprehension; both are true and true for him. He makes use of the table with full confidence for his physical purposes, and with equal confidence makes intellectual use of it for his scientific knowledge. But the knowledge is his who is a man. If a particular man as an individual did not exist, the table would exist all the same, but still as a thing that is related to the human mind. The contradiction that there is between the table of our sense perception and the table of our scientific knowledge has its common centre of reconciliation in human personality.[41]

Such is the context in which God is said to be the Supreme Person. His recognition as such by us as persons constitutes the Religion of Man.

> The theologian may follow the scientist and shake his head and say that all that I have written is pantheism. But let us not indulge in an idolatry of name and dethrone living truth in its favour. When I say that I am a man, it is implied by that word that there is such a thing as a general idea of Man which persistently manifests itself in every particular human being, who is different from all other individuals. If we lazily label such a belief as 'pananthropy' and divert our thoughts from its mysteriousness by such a title it does not help us much. Let me assert my faith by saying that this world, consisting of what we call animate and inanimate things, has found its culmination in man, its best expression. Man, as a creation, represents the Creator, and this is why of all creatures it has been possible for him to comprehend this world in his knowledge and in his feeling and in his imagination to realize in his individual spirit a union with a Spirit that is everywhere.[42]

And what then is the truth of religion? 'Suppose that some psychological explorer suspects that man's devotion to his beloved has, at bottom, our primitive stomach's hankering for human flesh; we need not contradict him; for whatever may be its genealogy, its secret composition, the complete character of our love, in its perfect mingling of physical, mental and spiritual associations, is unique in its utter difference from cannibalism. *The truth underlying the possibility of such transmutation is the truth of our religion*'.[43]

This truth of religion determines the goal of religion.

It is for us to realize the Person who is in the heart of the All by the emancipated consciousness of our own personality.[44]

It is possible to adopt such a path to Reality, because 'Reality can be regarded as Personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations'.[45]

V

Gandhi arrived at his vision of universal religion with Truth as the central point through ceaseless spiritual endeavour; and Radhakrishnan arrived at his Religion of the Spirit as a precipitate of prolonged study, but Tagore discovered his Religion of Man in a mystical flash, albeit not without some subtle anticipations. He introduces his account disarmingly:

> I hope that my readers have understood, as they have read these pages, that I am neither a scholar nor a philosopher. They should not expect from me fruits gathered from a wide field of studies or wealth brought by a mind trained in the difficult exploration of knowledge. Fortunately for me the subject of religion gains in interest and value by the experience of the individuals who earnestly believe in its truth. This is my apology for offering a part of the story of my life which has always realized its religion through a process of growth and not by the help of inheritance or importation.[46]

He is ready to share his experience with the reader, after offering some relevant autobiographical glimpses.

> When I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun sending out its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind; and this is the definition of beauty. That which was memorable in this experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the super-personal world of man. The poem I wrote on the first day of my surprise was named 'The Awakening of the Waterfall'. The waterfall, whose spirit lay dormant in its icebound isolation, was touched by the sun and, bursting in a cataract of freedom, it found its finality in an unending sacrifice, in a continual union with the sea. After four days the vision passed away, and the lid hung down upon my inner sight. In the dark, the

world once again put on its disguise of the obscurity of an ordinary fact.

When I grew older and was employed in a responsible work in some villages I took my place in neighbourhood where the current of time ran slow and joys and sorrows had their simple and elemental shades and lights. The day which had its special significance for me came with all its drifting trivialities of the commonplace life. The ordinary work of my morning had come to its close, and before going to take my bath I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a market-place on the bank of a dry river bed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. The feeling which I had was like that which a man, groping through a fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house.[47]

He goes on to describe the experience further, hoping to place it more within our reach with a suitable illustration:

I still remember the day in my childhood when I was made to struggle across my lessons in a first primer, strewn with isolated words smothered under the burden of spelling. The morning hour appeared to me like a once-illumined page, grown dusty and faded, discoloured into irrelevant marks, smudges and gaps, wearisome in its moth-eaten meaninglessness. Suddenly I came to a rhymed sentence of combined words, which may be translated thus – 'It rains, the leaves tremble'. At once I came to a world wherein I recovered my full meaning. My mind touched the creative realm of expression, and at that moment I was no longer a mere student with his mind muffled by spelling lessons, enclosed by classroom. The rhythmic picture of the tremulous leaves beaten by the rain opened before my mind the world which does not merely carry information, but a harmony with my being. The unmeaning fragments lost their individual isolation and my mind revelled in the unity of a vision. In a similar manner, on that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth. All things that had seemed like vagrant waves were revealed to my mind in relation to a boundless sea. I

felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences, uniting them into an even-widening individuality which is a spiritual work of art.[48]

Then Tagore concludes this part of the narrative by saying:

To this Being I was responsible; for the creation in me is his as well as mine. It may be that it was the same creative Mind that is shaping the universe to its eternal idea; but in me as a person it had one of its special centres of a personal relationship growing into a deepening consciousness. I had my sorrows that left their memory in a long burning track across my days, but I felt at that moment that in them I lent myself to a travail of creation that ever exceeded my own personal bounds like stars which in their individual fire-bursts are lighting the history of the universe. It gave me a great joy to feel in my life detachment at the idea of a mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship. *I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation.*[49]

VI

Although the experience on which Tagore bases his concept of universal religion – the Religion of Man – is personal in nature, Tagore relates it carefully both to the central Hindu Vedantic tradition[50] and the less central Baul tradition of Bengal.[51] He also sees the rise of Zoroastrianism[52] as illustrative of his own understanding of religion. The same holds true for him of Taoism.[53] He interprets the doctrine of the Four Stages of Life in Hinduism as providing a passage to the universal: 'From individual body to community, from community to universe, from universe to Infinity – this is the soul's normal progress'.[54] The role of the aesthetic dimension is emphasized in this context.[55] 'In Art the person in us sends its answers to the Supreme person'.[56]

Tagore's Religion of Man represents a universal religion in several senses. First, he regularly characterizes the consciousness within man which he talks about so often as universal.[57] This is because his Religion of Man deals with a human being as such, disregarding the externals.[58] It is also universal in the sense that it recognizes

the interconnectedness of all human beings and the primacy of love.[59]

> In the night we stumble over things and become acutely conscious of their individual separateness. But the day reveals the greater unity which embraces them. The man whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness at once realizes the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences. His mind no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world, accepting them as final. He realizes that peace is in the inner harmony which dwells in truth and not in any outer adjustments. *He knows that beauty carries an eternal assurance of our spiritual relationship to reality, which waits for its perfection in the response of our love.*[60]

One point remains to be considered. Tagore's *experience* was mystical, it will probably be labelled panenhenic in Zaehner's typology. Tagore's Religion of Man is, however, theistic. We may consider Tagore as using Nature and God in the service of Man. At the same time he recognizes, from his point of view, the inadequacy of the monistic and yogic mystical experiences as providing the foundation of a universal religion. In fact, Tagore is even reluctant to accept the monistic experience as religious! He writes:

> In India, there are those whose endeavour is to merge completely their personal self in an impersonal entity which is without any quality or definition; to reach a condition wherein mind becomes perfectly blank, losing all its activities. Those who claim the right to speak about it say that this is the purest state of consciousness, it is all joy and without any object or content. This is considered to be the ultimate end of *Yoga*, the cult of union, thus completely to identify one's being with the infinite Being who is beyond all thoughts and words. Such realization of transcendental consciousness accompanied by a perfect sense of bliss is a time-honoured tradition in our country, carrying in it the positive evidence which cannot be denied by any negative argument of refutation. Without disputing its truth I maintain that it may be valuable as a great psychological experience but all the same it is not religion, even as the knowledge of the ultimate state of the atom is of no use to an artist who deals in images in which atoms have taken forms. A certain condition of vacuum is needed for studying the state of things in its

original purity, and the same may be said of the human spirit; but the original state is not necessarily the perfect state. The concrete form is a more perfect manifestation than the atom, the man is more perfect as a man than where he vanishes in an original indefiniteness.[61]

Yogic mysticism also does not find favour with Tagore:

The special mental attitude which India has in her religion is made clear by the word *Yoga*, whose meaning is to effect union. Union has its significance not in the realm of *to have*, but in that of *to be*. To *gain* truth is to admit its separateness, but to *be* true is to become one with truth. Some religions, which deal with our relationship with God, assure us of reward if that relationship be kept true. This reward has an objective value. It gives us some reason outside ourselves for pursuing the prescribed path. We have such religions also in India. But those who have attained a greater height aspire for their fulfilment in union with *Narayana*, the supreme Reality of Man, which is divine.[62]

The universal religion of Tagore is personal, interpersonal and relational and hence Tagore does not pay much attention to explaining the historical differences among religions. When the issue does arise, the historical is enveloped within the universal and the personal:

The civilizations evolved in India or China, Persia or Judaea, Greece or Rome, are like several mountain peaks having different altitude, temperature, flora and fauna, and yet belonging to the same claim of hills. There are no absolute barriers of communication between them; their foundation is the same and they affect the meteorology of an atmosphere which is common to us all. This is at the root of the meaning of the great teacher who said he would not seek his own salvation if all men were not saved; for we all belong to a divine unity, from which our great-souled men have their direct inspiration; they feel it immediately in their own personality, and they proclaim in their life, "I am one with the Supreme, with the deathless, with the Perfect."[63]

Rabindranath Tagore was identified at the beginning of this chapter as a universalist par excellence and this chapter may be concluded by reaffirming that fact.

Allow me to do so dramatically. One of the more memorable poems among Tagore's poetic offerings in the Gītāñjali, the book which won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, is the following:

> Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow
> domestic walls;
> Where words come out from the depth of truth;
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary
> desert sand of dead habit;
> Where the mind is led forward by thee into everwidening thought
> and action –
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.[64]

The country apparently intended in the last line is India. But is this not an invocation which could be addressed to *any* and every country in the world?

9

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Mahatma Gandhi (1868–1948)

I

One needs to distinguish the idea of *religious universalism* from that of a *universal religion* while exploring the concept of universal religion in modern Hindu thought. Most of the spokesmen of Hinduism in modern times really espoused the former, some the latter, while a few took both the possibilities into account. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) nowhere espouses the case for universal religion, and far less the case for *a* universal religion as such. On the contrary, he declares:

> Personally I think the world as a whole will never have, and need to have, a single religion.[1]

Yet there are few modern Hindu figures who functioned as much as he did in the context of religious pluralism, or have more perceptive remarks to offer on the topic of universal religion.

One may begin by observing that if the term universal religion is to be employed in a Gandhian context, then that is how we would have to describe his relationship to Hinduism itself! Mahatma Gandhi insisted, throughout his life, that he was a 'Sanatani [orthodox] Hindu,'[2] and yet he used the word Hinduism virtually as a synonym for a universal religion, not in the sense that he made it a missionary religion but in the sense that 'The Mahātmā's religious outlook was universal'.[3] He claimed that 'There is in Hinduism room enough for Jesus, as there is for Mohammad, Zoroaster and Moses. For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they

are branches from the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect.'[4] We shall have more to say on this last point later. What needs to be recognized at the moment is the fact that while Gandhi does not identify Hinduism with any of the other religions, but insists on the Hindu's right to treat them as his own. When the recital of verses from the Qur'ān at his prayer meetings drew criticism, he replied that 'the true Hindu saw Truth in every religion', and that it was 'wholly un-Hindu and irreligious to object' to the recitation of verses from the Qur'ān.[5] His position, on what might be called his Hindu universalism, was summarized as follows:

> Hinduism of his conception was all-sufficing for him. It certainly included the *Vedas*, but it included also much more. He could detect no inconsistency in declaring that he could, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines. Tulsidas had summed it up in one *doha*: 'The root of religion is embedded in mercy, whereas egotism is the root of sin. Tulsi says that 'Mercy' should never be abandoned, so long as there is life in the body'.[6]

It is possible to argue that Gandhi's Jaina background was at play here. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that it was a Jaina monk who administered the triple oaths of abstention from meat, sex and wine prior to his departure to London,[7] and the person he came closest to acknowledging as a Guru was also a Jaina.[8] Yet it was this same Raychandbhai who reassured Gandhi of the virtues *of Hinduism*, when he was assailed by doubts.[9]

Religious pluralism had already been woven into the tapestry of his thinking as a Hindu from early childhood.[10] Margaret Chatterjee is thus referring to a profoundly Hindu and Indian ethos when she writes:

> It is necessary to say straightaway that Gandhi was not concerned with 'the problem of religious pluralism' in the sense that Christian theologians wrestle with it today. His was not the task of assessing rival truth claims, of reconciling apparently disparate visions, of formulating an intellectual model wherein theology can somehow or other be conceived in a global form. Pluralism never presents

itself as an intellectual problem for Gandhi. Anyone with a Jain background takes it for granted. It always puzzled him that those who professed to follow the man for whom all alike were the children of God should set up barriers of allegiance between man and man, between saved and unsaved, between one sect and another, between the Christian *vis-à-vis* men of 'other faiths.' The Hindu takes it for granted that there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, that the tree of mankind has many branches and each branch a myriad leaves. There has never been, throughout the long history of the Indian peoples, anything like (to borrow a phrase) a Ptolemaic standpoint. The danger, if at all, has been of the opposite kind, a tendency to find a sameness which can underplay the genuine differences which have been shaped by history, to proclaim an essence which does not sufficiently recognise the quiddity of traditions, all those elements that are not to be classified as accidental.[11]

II

It is, however, typically in the context of religious pluralism that the discussion of a universal religion proceeds. In this respect Gandhi reached some firm conclusions and his attitude to religious universalism will have to be assessed in the light of those conclusions. Perhaps the best way to present his views is to do so in his own words, but by organising them in a systematic way. Mahatma Gandhi states, at one point in his autobiography, which he significantly entitled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*:

> After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true; (2) all religions have some error in them; (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible.[12]

What does Gandhi mean by the first proposition: that all religions are true? He explains the statement as follows:

> I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were

> necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.[13]

He elaborates the point further as follows:

> It is my conviction that all the great faiths of the world are true, are God-ordained and that they serve the purpose of God and of those who have been brought up in those surroundings and those faiths. I do not believe that the time will ever come when we shall be able to say there is only one religion in the world. In a sense, even today there is one fundamental religion in the world. But there is no such thing as a straight line in nature. Religion is one tree with many branches. As branches, you may say religions are many, but as tree, religion is only one.[14]

What does Gandhi mean by the second proposition: that all religions have some element of error in them? He explains:

> I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And, I, therefore, admit, in all humility, that even the Vedas, the Koran and the Bible are imperfect word of God and, imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fullness.[15]

And what does Gandhi mean when he says that all religions are as dear to him as Hinduism? Gandhi explains this as follows, keeping the second proposition in sight:

> I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran and the Zend Avesta, to be as much divinely

> inspired as the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired.... I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense.[16]

He took this third proposition so seriously that he was accused of being a closet Christian! His response to the charge is illuminating:

> It is both a libel and a compliment – a libel because there are men who can believe me to be capable of being secretly anything, i.e. for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussulman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Quran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussulman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians nor Mussulmans. There all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their profession. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.[17]

From these three theoretical propositions follows a practical conclusion: a stand against conversion:[18]

> Proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God.[19]

The upshot of the foregoing discussion seems to be that Gandhi's position is best described as that of *religious egalitarianism*. The following two accounts are relevant here. The first relates to Gandhi's conversation with one Mr Keithahn. 'Mr. Keithahn who was here the other day was not quite sure what was at the back of Gandhiji's mind when he said that all religions were not only true but equal.

Scientifically, he felt, it was hardly correct to say that all religions are equal. People would make comparisons between animists and theists. 'I would say', said Mr Keithahn, 'it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?'

'You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physically and mentally. Therefore, superficially there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithahn. And what are we in this mighty universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no use asking which is smaller and which is bigger. Inherently we are equal. The differences of race and skin, of mind and body, and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way, essentially, all religions are equal. If you read the Quran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the *Gita*, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of Genesis or of Matthew. We read a long pedigree and then at the end we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it all with the eye of a Christian.'

'Then', said Mr. Keithahn, 'even in our Bible, there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We might hold them to be equal?'

'Yes', said Gandhiji. 'All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plane.'

'If we think in terms of Einstein's Relativity all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality.'

'That is why I say they are equally true and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, "Mine is the superior one." None is superior, none is inferior, to the other.'[20]

The second account pertains to Kakasaheb Kalelkar, a follower of Gandhi. 'Kakasaheb Kalelkar, who presided over the third day's session of the Parliament of Religions which met in Calcutta [in 1937], carried a message from Gandhiji which was expressed in a question: "What will the Parliament of Religions say in respect of all religions? Are all religions equal, as we hold, or is any particular religion in the

sole possession of truth and the rest either untrue or a mixture of truth and error as many believe? The opinion of the Parliament in such matters must prove a helpful guidance"'. I do not know that the Parliament did express any opinion on this crucial question, but as we saw in the last issue, Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore's discourse left no doubt on the question. Kakasaheb invited the leaders present on the third day to express their opinion, and Sir Francis Younghusband in response to the invitation is reported to have said:

> To Mahatma Gandhi's question I would add another question: Are all mothers equally good? All mothers are not equally good, but each would think his own mother as the best in the world. Similarly, each one would regard his own religion as the best in the world. At any rate, that was certainly the impression that he gained at the World Congress of Faiths last year. Each one did honestly believe that his religion was the best. I have come in very close contact with people of diverse faiths and have discovered a fundamental unity among all these religions. It is this fundamental unity which I desire this Congress to realize and deepen and make it permanent and abiding.[21]

Gandhi raised the following question regarding conversion: 'Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied that the Hindu is a good or godly man.'[22] What Gandhi was saying in effect was that conduct counts for more than belief, a position which is questioned by dogmatic religions.[23] Gandhi here was reflecting a typical modern Hindu position, for 'Hinduism recognizes different levels of religious experience and arranges them in their order of excellence. Real conversion is vertical – i.e. from the lower to the higher contemplation of God, and not horizontal – i.e., from one formal faith to another.'[24]

In this context of religious egalitarianism, Gandhi regards the *scriptures* of the religions more equal than their *symbols*. The symbols are equal too, though at the lower level than the scriptures. He says of the scriptures:

> I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred city. We need not dread, upon our grown up children, the influence of scriptures other than

> our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when some one reads his own scriptures to young people with the intention secretly or openly of converting them. He must then be biased in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the Bible, the Quran, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu. He is no *Sanatani* Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures to satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.[25]

Mahatma Gandhi did feel, however, that religious symbols should be distinguished from scriptures (and remarked) that 'so long as there are different religions, every one of them may need some distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over other's, it is fit only to be discarded'.[26] They are thus externals,[27] in a way scriptures were not. At the level of symbols he equated idolatry and bibliolatry:

> In his post-prayer speech Gandhiji said that he would advise the Hindus and the Sikhs to read the *Quran* as they read the *Gita* and the *Granthasaheb*. To the Muslims he would say that they should read the *Gita* and the *Granthasaheb* with the same reverence with which they read the *Quran*. They should understand the meaning of what they read and have equal regard for all religions. This was his life-long practice and ideal. He claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, though he was not an idolater in the accepted sense. But he could not despise those who worshipped idol. The idol-worshipper saw God in the stone image. God was omnipresent. If it was wrong to see God in a stone how was it right to seek Him in a book called the *Gita*, the *Granthasaheb* or the *Quran*? Was not that also idol-worship? By cultivating tolerance and respect they would be able to

learn from all. Then they would forget the communal differences and live together in peace and amity.[28]

III

It is a curious fact that Gandhi shared many attitudes with other modern Hindu thinkers which are associated with a move towards the recognition of an implicit, if not an explicit, universal religion or something close to it. For instance, Gandhi's approach to religion was ahistorical. 'Gandhi is not concerned with the historicity or otherwise of Krishna and why, as he himself says, it would not matter whether or not the historic Jesus had ever existed, for the Sermon on the Mount would still remain as a shining testimony. The question about the testimony *of whom* thereby becomes subordinate to the question of the testimony *to what*.'[29] Similarly, he emphasized the role of experience in religion. 'Gandhi made an interesting comment about new interpretations of scripture in 1927 when he wrote that many things in the Bible needed to be interpreted "in the light of discoveries – not of modern science – but in the spiritual world in the shape of direct experiences common to all faiths". This is in keeping with the Hindu stress on the authority of *anubhūti* (inner experience), the inner light which lightens one's path.'[30] He also recognized the universality of religious aspiration, even in such surrogate forms as bolshevism: 'whenever he commented on what was then known as bolshevism he recognised in it a manifestation of that same aspiration which takes a more familiar garb in the religious quest'.[31]

These pieces of evidence make one wonder if one may not have passed one's verdict on Gandhi somewhat prematurely in connection with universal religion. A universal aspiration was certainly at work, as when he reversed his famous formulation from 'God is truth' to 'truth is God',[32] because moral consciousness is more universal than theistic consciousness.[33]

Gandhi's insistence that no religion is perfect helps us understand why he never pushed the point that if God is one, only one religion could be true. He wrote:

> If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of

our imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.

Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity of tolerance, which does not mean indifference to one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the North Pole from the South. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith.[34]

It is in this spirit that we must understand the following statements of Mahatma Gandhi:

By religion, I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker.[35]

* * *

Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps,

always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions.[36]

IV

This left the field open for the celebration of religious universalism. The following account of a prayer meeting at a Gandhi Ashram is a somewhat extended one. It was recalled for the benefit of Ved Mehta by an 'apostle' of Mahatma Gandhi. It does, however, provide a glimpse of what a prayer meeting of a 'universal religion' would have been like, if Gandhi had not been prevented by his commitment of religious universalism from developing such a concept, if not a fact.

We usually began with a Buddhist chant that a Japanese monk had taught us. Someone beat a little drum and said in Japanese, 'I bow to all the Buddhas, I bow to all the Buddhas, I bow to all the Buddhas, I bow to all the Buddhas.' After that, we meditated for two minutes and then recited together, in Hindi, our Hindu morning prayer: 'O God with a curved mouth, a big body, refulgent like ten million suns, keep me ever free from harm whilst doing beneficent acts.... I bow to Vishnu, who is peace incarnate, who lies on a snaky bed, from whose navel grows the lotus'. Then Brother Kanu read a few Arabic verses from the Koran in praise of Allah:

For those that fear the majesty of their Lord there are two gardens... planted with shady trees. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?...

Each bears every kind of fruit in pairs. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?

They shall recline on couches lined with thick brocade, and within their reach will hang the fruits of both gardens. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?...

Virgins as fair as corals and rubies. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?...

And besides these there shall be two other gardens... of darkest green. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?...

In each there shall be virgins chaste and fair. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?

Dark-eyed virgins sheltered in their tents... whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?

They shall recline on green cushions and rich carpets. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?

Blessed be the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and glory!

There were no Muslim priests living with us at the time, but Brother Kanu had been trained to read the Koran in their special guttural, singsong way. After that, we reaffirmed our dedication to Bapu's principles with these resolutions: 'We will be nonviolent; we will be truthful; we will not steal; we will be continent; we will not hoard; we will all wear khadi clothes; we will work with our hands; we will eat simple foods; we will be fearless; we will treat people of all religions equally; and we will work for the eradication of untouchability.' Then came a Pahlavi verse from the common Zoroastrian prayer of the Parsis. We seldom had a Parsi among us, but it was an easy prayer to say, and we took turns reading it: 'O Ahura Mazda, reveal unto me the Word and Actions of the highest religion, so that, keeping to the path of righteousness, I sing thy praises. Lead my path as you desire. Grant freshness to my life and the bliss of paradise.'

Then we sang a lot of hymns, keeping time with tiny metal finger cymbals or by clapping our hands. Bapu had a thin, uncertain singing voice, which was never quite in tune with the others. One of his favorite hymns was the Christian hymn 'Lead, Kindly Light,' but neither he nor anyone else ever mastered the tune. We all had our favorite hymns. I think I liked best the Urdu hymns in praise of Allah – they are so poetic. But I also especially liked the Hindi hymn with the line 'Learn good sense from a tree, O mind', and the Bengali hymn that says, 'Make my heart fixed on Thy holy lotus feet and make it full of joy, full of joy, full of joy'. A foreign visitor once remarked that our singing seemed to be one long wail, but we always enjoyed the sound of our own music.

Then came the *dhuns*, the invocations of the Hindu God under His various names and incarnations. Every child knows Bapu's favorite *dhun*, in praise of Ram:

Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram,
Patita Pavana Sita Ram.
Ishwara Allah Tere Nam,
Sabko Sanmati De Bhagavan.

[This can be translated as 'O King of Raghu clan, Ram, you and Sita are the purifiers of sinners. Ishwar and Allah both are your names. Give us good sense, O Lord'. Sita is Rama's wife, Ishwar is the God of the Hindus, and Allah, of course, is the God of the Muslims.]

But we said so many others. We said one for Krishna:

Jai Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Jai Govind, Hare Govind,
Jai Gopal, Radha Gopal.

['Hail Krishna, God Krishna, Hail Govind, God Govind, Hail Gopal, Radha's Gopal.' Govind and Gopal are two of Krishna's names, and Radha is his consort.]

We said one for Shiva:

Samb Sadashiv Samb Sadashiv
Samb Sadishiv Samb Shiva;
Har Har Har Har Samb Sadashiv
Samb Sadashiv Samb Shiva.

[These are all names of the god Shiva, Har being another form of Hare, signifying God.]

We said another one for Ram:

Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Hare;
Bhaj Man Nishidini Pyare.

['O God Ram, God Ram, God Ram, God; O mind, think of the beloved day and night.']

We chanted innumerable rounds of *dhuns*, clapping out the rhythm faster and faster and louder and louder. Nothing thrilled Bapu more. He was in ecstasy as the names of God rolled over us.

The prayer meeting finished with someone reading from the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit. The Bhagavad Gita was the most important book in Bapu's life – over the years he must have read it thousands of times – and it was read through from beginning to end every week at morning and evening prayers in the ashram. Bapu

didn't mind who did the reading, of course – a Brahman or an untouchable – but Ba, who remained somewhat orthodox despite Bapu's efforts to reeducate her, preferred to hear it from a Brahman's lips.[37]

Thus we find in the end the Gandhi couple simultaneously representing the two Hinduisms – the universal Hinduism and the particular Hinduism. The loam and the flower?

10

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of Śrī Aurobindo (1872–1950)

I

The exploration of the concept of universal religion in the thought of Śrī Aurobindo (1872–1950) requires a certain delicacy of treatment, if it does not actually present a difficulty in its ascertainment. Modern Hindu thinkers have understood the concept of universal religion in various ways: Vivekānanda offered different concepts of universal religion itself, rather than a single concept of universal religion; Radhakrishnan focused on the 'religion' component of the expression to let universality take care of itself, as it were; Rabindranath Tagore was so imbued with the universal that the religion part stands by as the best-man, and Mahatma Gandhi seemed to speak more of what might be called religious universalism than universal religion. In Aurobindo the concept of universal religion is either 'always on the point of waking but never waking', or, from another point of view, never goes to sleep. He stays most of the time on this side of the conceptual frontier it represents, though all the while heading towards it; or he operates in an area beyond that frontier, while subsuming it. Hence it is not the case that the concept is absent in the thought of Aurobindo, rather, it does not occupy as well-defined a place as it does in the thought of some other modern Hindu thinkers, and therefore has to be teased out, though not artificially but certainly deliberately.

II

The contours of his career capture the imagination immediately in such an effort, for each phase compels the exploration of a certain dimension of his concept of universal religion. His life[1] falls into five, more or less clear-cut, phases from this point of view: (1) until 1893 he spent thirteen years of his life as a student in England, where he had been shipped by his anglophile father at the age of seven; (2) from 1893–1906 he Indianized himself, in contrast to his prior Westernization, during his period of employment with the Gaekwar of Baroda; (3) from 1906–1914 he spent in active participation in militant politics in the wake of the Partition of Bengal, during which he was thrice prosecuted by the British authorities; (4) from 1914–1926 (the earlier phase of his stay at Pondicherry) he pursued Indology and published the journal *Arya* (until 1921); (5) from 1926–1950 he went into complete retirement:

> Only twice during these twenty-five years did he try openly to influence public affairs. The first occasion was when he declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies and against Hitler in the Second World War and contributed to the war-fund and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war-effort. The second occasion was when he publicly supported Cripps's offer to India and urged the Congress leaders to accept it so that India and Britain might stand united against the evil forces of Hitler and Nazism.[2]

One would expect Aurobindo, in the first phase of his life, to act or react in relation to the Western concept of universal religion, according to which 'a religion is ordinarily characterised as being universal if it makes available for all mankind a uniform body of faith and doctrine'.[3] Moreover, if we consider imperialism as a perverted version of internationalism,[4] and internationalism as the first cousin of universalism, the heavy dose of Westernization Aurobindo was subjected to should have turned his thoughts in that direction. But the expected did not happen, and the unexpected did. Aurobindo reacted to imperialism, not with internationalism like Tagore, but with nationalism, upon his return to India. 'Brief as his political career was, Aurobindo defined the essence of religious nationalism in a manner which for sheer passion has never been surpassed. Because of his prolonged absence from India, Aurobindo came to idealize both his native land

and its ancestral faith and to identify one with the other in a way no previous thinker had dared to do'.[5]

While describing his mystical experience under British detention in the Alipore gaol, he saw Hinduism itself at times as a universal religion in the conventional Western sense, though the Hindu understanding by and large dominates his thought. He spoke of having heard, then, the voice of God as follows, in his famous Uttapara speech[6] of 30 May, 1909:

> Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. *It is this religion that I am raising up before the world, it is this that I have perfected and developed through ṛṣis, saints and* avatārs *and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising up this nation to send forth my word...* When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the *Sanātana Dharma* that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world....It is for the *Dharma* that India exists.[7]

It was after his retirement from active politics that Aurobindo found more time to develop his spiritual vision which had emerged from his national vision, then encompassed it, and was destined to surpass it. Rabindranath Tagore hailed him in both these 'incarnations', as hero and sage:

> I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him 'You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world, "Harken to me"'.
>
> In her earlier forest home Sakuntala had her awakenment of life in the restlessness of her youth. In the later hermitage she attained the fulfillment of her life. Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him, 'Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath'.
>
> Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence, 'Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath'.[8]

His religious nationalism, however, was already modified by a universalistic tendency in many ways, the most striking of which was the

identification of an incarnation or *avatāra* with a whole nation[9] rather than an individual (although the full turn from nationalism to internationalism would come later).[10] But during the more active phase of his stay at Pondicherry, he provided Hinduism with a more universalistic orientation. For instance, in his Essays on the Gita he 'accepted the theory of the four castes but gives it a subjective and universal meaning. It does not teach any such absurd doctrine as that every man should follow, without regard to his personal bent and capacities, the profession of his parents, the son of a milkman being a milkman, the son of a tailor being a tailor and the descendants of shoe-makers remaining shoe-makers for all time'.[11] Not only did he interpret doctrines within Hinduism more universally, his thinking in general became more oriented towards humanity. It is a point of some interest though, that, at a time when the independence of India was only a gleam in a few patriotic eyes, both Aurobindo and Gandhi were 'less concerned with political independence than with what India would do with that independence'.[12] Aurobindo, in the early phase at Pondicherry, offered a universalistically balanced interpretation of Hinduism. The word balanced is not being employed blandly here. It relates to the fact that Aurobindo offered an interpretation of Hinduism which avoids the parochialism of preference, the preference for ritualism in the Brhāmaṇas as well as the preference for world-negation, for which he faulted the later Upaniṣads and some forms of Vedānta. He advocated, against such a view, the universalism of holism, as he found it in the ṚgVeda, the earlier Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the Tantras, wherein 'a healthy integration of God and the world, renunciation and enjoyment, freedom of the soul and action in Nature, Being and Becoming, the One and the Many, Vidya and Avidya, knowledge and works, and birth and release' had been achieved:

> The aim of Sri Aurobindo is to supplement all [such] fragmentary views, reaffirm the integral view of life set forth in the Veda, the *Isha Upanishad*, the Gita and the Tantras, and also to rediscover, as it were, the ancient *Sadhana* and free it, as far as possible, from the limitations and the symbolism of any particular theology and make it available for all, without distinction of caste or creed, nationality or religion, so that, following it, humanity may reach a higher plane in its spiritual evolution. He says, 'All religions have saved a number of souls, but none has yet been able to spiritualize mankind. For that, there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all-comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution'.[13]

The use of the word 'evolution' creates room for making the next point, that the thought of Aurobindo, as it evolved further, incorporated the concept of evolution.[14] It then also enables one to make the further point, that his philosophy paralleled his biography; that just as he first underwent Westernization and then Indianization, his thought reflects 'the positive blending of Western and Indian values. Although he eventually transcended – and has urged both India and West to transcend – the limitations of any one culture, he was able to move beyond Indian and Western ideas precisely because he had so thoroughly assimilated the creative elements of both traditions'.[15] His universal thrust, however, seems to bypass Islam.[16]

III

A transition is thus accomplished from the universalism of Hinduism, through the universalism of holism, to the universalism of humanism. There is little discussion of universal religion as such; rather the religious vision is progressively universalized, a vision which finds its culmination in *The Life Divine*, his magnum opus.[17] Very briefly, Aurobindo takes Brahman as his starting point, with its triune designation as *sat, cit* and *ānanda*, but he translates these terms more potently as Pure Existence, Consciousness-Force and Delight of Existence. By a process of involution, outside of time, these three aspects of the higher hemisphere of Being 'involve' into Matter, Life and Mind at the lower hemisphere. The Supermind, which also belongs to the higher hemisphere, is also the link between the two. Spiritual evolution consists of the movement back to Brahman, which has so far only been accomplished individually by beings rising to the Supermind and through it to the higher hemisphere. The next stage in evolution, however, consists of bringing the Supermind down to the lower hemisphere, a phenomenon which will make salvation universal, which is one lexical connotation of the word universal. The word, however, is capable of even further semantic extension.

In Aurobindo, the concept of universal religion,[18] if one must employ that expression, is transfigured into that of universal evolution. Perhaps even the word universal sinks under the weight of its new meaning and may need to be replaced by cosmic. Here then is a point of convergence between the thought of Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin, which has not eluded scholarly detection.[19]

One thus finds that the concept of universal religion achieves an unexpected extension in the thought of Śrī Aurobindo. The incorporation of the process of evolution imparts to the term universal a significance which extends far beyond its usual associations, and identifies it as the locus of a religious evolution, which involves the transformation of the entire universe, that is, cosmos. In this transformation all the individuals have their own role to play, some more than others, such as those who represent the counterparts in Aurobindo's system of the 'Hindu ideal of *Jivanmukta* and the Buddhist ideal of *Bodhisattva*',[20] those who possess the higher mind, the Illumined mind, the Intuitive mind and the Overmind: all of whom are progressively more advanced to assist in the descent of the Supermind. In the cosmic Universal Religion the humble individual too, the resident of the Ashram, has his or her role to play as well. As the pamphlet of the Ashram, entitled the *Message of Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram*, states:

> That man can grow out of his present imperfections into a perfect individual, that the perfect man can become a nucleus and a force for the evolution of a perfect society and that the true Unity of the Human Race can only outflower from a union on the soul level – is in substance the central part of his teaching. The key to this change of man is essentially spiritual, and it lies in the evocation and development of the latent faculties of his inner and innermost being. Man has to cease to live on the surface, learn to live from within outward, he must find his soul. All life in the Ashram centres round this Truth.[21]

This is as it should be, for 'the logic of the Supermind', which is 'the logic of the infinite' resolves the oppositions of the ordinary mind, such as the one between the universal and the individual.[22]

IV

If, among the various attempts at universal religion, that of Tagore was the most poetic, and of Gandhi the most heroic, then that of Aurobindo is certainly the most cosmic. It is also the most daring, so daring that it may be too early to pronounce on it.

One of the characteristic features of the religious ferment in modern India was the 'interaction between traditional Hindu religious life

and Western intellectual traditions'[23] through the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. It has been suggested that 'Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) and Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950) are perhaps the best known and most influential representatives of this pattern in the twentieth century'.[24] There is a greater measure of unanimity about the influential impact of Gandhi's work than that of Aurobindo, who sometimes leaves the 'impression of being a little cut off from Indian thought'.[25] Interest in Aurobindo, however, seems to be on the increase, perhaps because he had set out to 'create a new synthesis of truth by drawing upon both Hindu and Western thought in such a way that an original theological and philosophical construct would emerge. In engaging in this task he was attempting to do for the modern world what Shankarāchārya had done for Hinduism in the ninth century and St Thomas Aquinas for Christianity in the thirteenth, but it is impossible to say how successful he has been'[26] – yet.

11

Universal Religion in the Life and Thought of S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975)

I

S. Radhakrishnan spoke with many voices on the question of universal religion in its broadest connotation. Moreover, his career was such a chequered one that his views on this point were expressed in many different contexts. Furthermore, Radhakrishnan was a prolific writer and speaker, so much so that the compilation of an exhaustive bibliography of his works remains an unfinished task. The discussion of the concept of universal religion in Radhakrishnan, therefore, presents special problems. The task, however, may be rendered less intractable by adopting a few preliminary clarificatory procedures. One of these would be to initially address the question of religious universalism rather than that of universal religion as such. The other would be to adopt a chronological rather than logical procedure at the outset. These two steps will enable us to follow the trajectory of his conceptualization of universal religion in such a way as to ultimately make it possible to identify that object with some definiteness, in his universe of discourse.

One may, therefore, as a first but vital step, follow the development of Radhakrishnan's views of religious universalism through the various periods of his career. Ishwar C. Harris, in his excellent study, *Radhakrishnan: The Profile of a Universalist,*[1] divides Radhakrishnan's career into four periods. His lead is worth following in this respect: (1) 1888–1908; (2) 1908–1926; (3) 1926–1945 and (4) 1945–1967.[2]

II

The first phase of Radhakrishnan's life, as identified here, commences with his birth and ends with the publication of his Master's thesis in 1908, followed by his appointment as a teacher in Madras Presidency College, in 1909. It naturally spans the period of his formal education at the Lutheran Mission High School, Tirupati (1896–1900), Voorhee's College, Vellore (1900–1904), and the Madras Christian College (1904–1908).[3] In one of the few autobiographical reflections Radhakrishnan permitted himself, he recalls how his Christian teachers, 'by their criticism of Indian thought... disturbed my faith and shook the traditional props on which I leaned'.[4] Early in his life he had been 'influenced by a surreptitious reading of the letters of Swami Vivekananda, with their eloquent appeal to India's youth to evince pride and self-respect',[5] but at the Madras Christian College, 'in his lectures on ethics to the MA classes Hogg spoke rather disparagingly of the ascetic and otherworldly tendencies of the Bhagavad Gita. These remarks, as well as the general atmosphere of the college, roused Radhakrishnan to examine for himself the religious beliefs of the Hindus'.[6] It is worth noting here that 'Radhakrishnan always acknowledged the permanent mark on his own mind of Hogg's influence, in both response and reaction'.[7]

The first movement towards religious universalism in Radhakrishnan's thought was apparently prompted by the particularism which he encountered at the college, both in the interpretation of Hinduism and of Christianity. To appreciate this situation one must realize that 'Especially after the revolt of 1857 the missionaries, instead of continuing to ignore the beliefs of the Indian Population as a mass of iniquitous superstition, studied them carefully – not because there might be grains of truth in them but to combat them better. A change in tactics did not involve a revision of the attitude of condescension. *The clinging to the certainty of a unique revelation ruled out the acceptance of a diversity of belief.* To know more about Hinduism was part of the missionary's equipment; to show its inadequacy in face of what Christ had to offer was the missionary's business'.[8]

Ishwar C. Harris seems to imply that the universalism of Vivekānanda's interpretation of Hinduism was also a strong factor in this situation[9] but V. Gopal, his son and biographer, writes that 'Though he had read Vivekananda, it has been the nationalist spirit rather than the exposition of religion which has impressed him.'[10] As Radhakrishnan's Master's thesis dealt with Vedānta and, as

Vivekānanda, in one of his interpretations, identified Vedānta with universal religion,[11] it is possible to reconcile the two interpretations to a degree.

The main expression of religious universalism, at this stage in the thought of Radhakrishnan, took the form of questioning the exclusivism of Christianity. 'Radhakrishnan boldly and explicitly rejected the uniqueness of Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Christ were not a solitary or a special portent but the supreme vindication of a universal spiritual law. It was no more than a dramatization of a normal psychological experience open to all. The crucifixion was the death of the lower egohood, the resurrection the rise of the true self.'[12]

In the second period of his life (1908–1926) the tendencies towards religious universalism were strengthened by three forces which made their impact on him during this period: (1) the influence of Rabindranath Tagore; (2) the quest for the metaphysical grounding of his religious universalism; and (3) the exploration of the relationship between philosophy and religion.

The case of Rabindranath Tagore is significant because in a way it rehearses the situation of the previous period:

> Irritated by the claims made in the West, especially after the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, that Tagore's outlook was deeply influenced by Christianity, Radhakrishnan set out to establish, by putting together and spelling out the views implicit in Tagore's writings, that he was in essence a Hindu Vedantist,... The Absolute which does not lend itself to intellectual description and the personal God of mystic religion whom Tagore celebrated both had a place in the Vedanta system; and those who made Tagore a borrower from Christianity betrayed to Radhakrishnan an astonishing lack of 'historic conscience.'[13]

The universalism here took the form – as it did earlier – of a response to Western cultural and religious chauvinism and the reassertion of Vedānta as its Hindu counterpoint. The movement towards religious universalism continued to be dialectical, in the sense that Radhakrishnan seemed to be responding to the narrow frame of reference with a broader one. In the case of Rabindranath Tagore, the subject of his case itself was a more powerful advocate of the case than Radhakrishnan's own advocacy could ever be!

Apart from his work on Tagore, during this period Radhakrishnan also published *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (1921) and *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. I, 1923). It is in *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* that Radhakrishnan lays down the philosophical foundations of universalistic religion, despite the 'clumsy'[14] title of the book:

> His thesis was that philosophy, taken to its logical conclusion, leads to absolute idealism and, if various forms of pluralistic theism were prevalent in the Western world, it was because of the subconscious interference of dogmatic religion with the intellectual pursuit of philosophy. Though he did not say so, Radhakrishnan was in fact criticizing the influence of Christianity.... In the final, constructive, section of the book too he contended that the only religion consistent with philosophy was a spiritual, absolutist, non-dogmatic view of religion such as the Vedanta. But this argument was not fully worked out and forms the weakest section of the book, which was basically an assault on the role of a religion dependent on authority. In a sense, Radhakrishnan was an absolute idealist in the Western tradition before he became a sympathetic exponent of the Vedanta. A more precise title of the book would have been 'The Reign of the Christian Religion in Contemporary Western Philosophy.'[15]

The idea that 'there is no one way to God' is clearly mentioned in a novel which Radhakrishnan attempted after this book.[16]

Already in *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Life*, Radhakrishnan had begun to imply that 'Instead of trying to make philosophy religious, we should if possible make religion philosophical',[17] and in articles published in the same year as the book (1921), he drew a distinction between 'philosophical religion' and 'religious philosophy'. Whereas the latter takes 'a biased stand towards a particular outlook',[18] the former is 'free from religious prejudices and seeks after the truth'.[19] Radhakrishnan found 'Hinduism as meeting the requirements of a philosophical religion. Thus, it became the basis of his universalism'.[20]

It was also clear from this book that it was 'Radhakrishnan's ambition to subordinate pluralism to idealism in order to arrive at universalism'. During this period Radhakrishnan began to see 'Hinduism as a philosophical religion based on idealism'[21] and hence universal in its orientation, fulfilling the 'requirements of universalism by

promoting an attitude of tolerance, co-operation, and unity. However, the real thrust of this message', according to Ishwar C. Harris, 'did not come about until the publication of his Upton lectures as *The Hindu View of Life* in 1927'.[22]

This takes us into the next phase of Radhakrishnan's career (1926–1945).[23] The approaches which have been adumbrated earlier achieved maturity during this period. This is immediately identifiable in the first book of this period, *The Hindu View of Life*, 'the material for which was originally delivered in the form of lectures, the Upton Lectures, in 1926, at Manchester College, Oxford, whereby Radhakrishnan redeemed his juvenile boast that if he ever went to Oxford it would be to teach and not to study!'[24] The book, since its appearance, has been continually in print to this day.

It is also during this period, that, as a comparative philosopher, Radhakrishnan uses the polarity between Hinduism and Christianity 'almost as a methodology in his study of religion. The result of this approach is that Hinduism provides him with a thesis, Christianity presents an antithesis, while his religious universalism provides a synthesis',[25] a description he probably would not mind given his interest in Hegelian idealism.[26]

The thesis takes the form that Hinduism is the 'most comprehensive faith for all mankind. From this perspective the universal appeal of Hinduism is consistently emphasized by Radhakrishnan',[27] whose 'definition of universalism implies such elements as *unity* (metaphysical, religious, social, etc.), *universal salvation, assimilation, mystical intuition* (as a basis of religious experience), *tolerance* and *peace*'.[28] Radhakrishnan demonstrates the existence of these elements in Hinduism in ample measure.

As an antithesis at least four elements stand out in Christianity:[29] (1) it is historical, Hinduism is ahistorical; (2) in its official form it is Christocentric and exclusive; (3) it accepts the idea of a general revelation (corresponding to natural theology); but (4) this must be complemented by or even yield price of place to a particular revelation which leads us back to points (1) and (2).

Another element in the dialectics is provided by the fact that Hinduism is patently non-missionary and Christianity aggressively missionary,[30] the two positions playing the role of a thesis with an antithesis.

The polarization is clear, but if what is contrary has been made contradictory, the problem is associated by Radhakrishnan with Christianity. He claims that 'every attempt on the part of the historical

religion to regain universality is bringing them nearer the religions of India'.[31] As for Jesus himself the 'universal emphasis' discernible in his teachings can be traced to the fact he spoke of 'religious truths that were universal', and/or that he was subject to liberating Indian influences. Pre-Constantine Christianity, similarly, was more universal when the Christian Fathers such as Clement and Origen did not discount the general revelation but subsequently, with the *filioque* clause and the like, the special revelation took over, a position represented by Barthian theology in modern times.

The suggestion of a full synthesis of these oppositions between Eastern and Western religions, which assume numerous forms and ramify through them as cultural systems and which are identified by S. Radhakrishnan during this period, would take place in a later period of his life. During this period it results in an appeal for respecting the *common spirit* behind all forms of religious expression – Eastern or Western – as providing a psychological basis for mutual acceptance. S. Radhakrishnan writes:

> If the Hindu chants the Vedas on the banks of the Ganges, if the Chinese meditates on the Analects, if the Japanese worships the image of Buddha, if the European is convinced of Christ's mediatorship, if the Arab reads the Qur'ān in his mosque, and if the African bows down to a fetish, each one of them has exactly the same reason for his particular confidence. Each form of faith appeals in precisely the same way to the inner certitude and devotion of its followers. It is their deepest apprehension of God and God's fullest revelation to them. The claim of any religion to validity is the fact that only through it have its followers become what they are. They have grown up with it and it has become a part of their being.[32]

Ishwar C. Harris assesses the situation in terms of religious universalism in the thought of this period as follows:

> Essentially, Radhakrishnan views religion as 'Sanātana Dharma' or the Eternal Religion. The different religions according to this Hindu theory become various aspects of the One religion. Thus, Radhakrishnan speaks of them as 'traditions' that are affected by their history and environment. Christianity, then, is viewed by him as a tradition that has a particular history, but in its essence it is akin to many other religious traditions. By implication, Radhakrishnan demands that its particularities be surrendered for the sake of the

> One religion which is universal. Here is the point of conflict between Radhakrishnan's thought and the exponents of the Christian faith. In defence of his own views on religion, Radhakrishnan directs many criticisms towards Christianity. Often these remarks are directed towards religions in general, but a slight insight reveals their applicability to Christianity in particular.[33]

It seems to us, however, that Radhakrishnan is still seeking a synthesis not in terms of *one religion* but in terms of *oneness of religion* as understood in the passage cited earlier.

The next phase of Radhakrishnan's career (1945–1967) witnessed the further development of his universal vision.[34] During this period it manifested itself in primarily two approaches – one textual and the other spiritual, approaches which roughly correspond to the earlier and later parts of the period.

The earlier part of this period is distinguished by the publication, by Radhakrishnan, of several major works of the Hindu tradition, especially those belonging to Vedānta. The Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and the Brahmasūtra constitute the canon of Vedānta as it were, and he published works on all three of them, as well as on the Dhammapada. One of the issues, which these scriptural texts raise, is the question of handling different parts of the scriptures at variance with each other. The basic approach recommended in this respect in the tradition is represented by Brahmasūtra I.1.4 (*tattu samanvayāt*), namely, that these passages are to be interpreted harmoniously. Radhakrishnan takes this cue and extends it to the scriptures of all the major world religions. This, then, is one direction in which his religious universalism prompted him to move. This also explains Radhakrishnan's liberal use of material drawn from other religious traditions in his commentaries on Hindu texts. Radhakrishnan states his universalism in this context succinctly:

> Today the *samanvaya* or harmonization has to be extended to the living faiths of mankind. Religion concerns man as man and not man as Jew or Christian, Hindu or Buddhist, Sikh or Muslim. As the author of the [Brahma Sūtra] tried to reconcile the different doctrines prevalent in his time, we have to take into account the present state of our knowledge, and evolve a coherent picture.[35]

It was also during this period that Radhakrishnan developed two key concepts: (1) the Religion of the Spirit; and (2) the Fellowship of

the Spirit, which represent the mature development of his thought on religious universalism crystallizing in some form of universal religion.

Before one embarks on an excursion on Radhakrishnan's concept of a universal religion, it seems desirable to conclude the discussion of his career. In 1967 he retired as the President of India. For the sake of completeness we might add a fifth and last period to his career in addition to the four identified by Ishwar C. Harris. This phase lasted from 1967 to his death in 1975 and was spent mostly in retirement in Madras.[36]

We have noticed how, virtually throughout his life, Radhakrishnan was an advocate of religious universalism in some form or another and we have tried to trace the trajectory of his thought, as it developed ideas of a religious universalism into an idea of a universal religion. It is towards a consideration of this topic that we now turn.[37]

III

During the phase of his life which we have placed within the chronological limits of 1926–1945, one of Radhakrishnan's prime concern was the opposition between East and West in matters of religion. Any move towards a universal religion had to take this opposition into account and resolve it in one way or another. The process by which Radhakrishnan tried to overcome this opposition may be summarized as follows:

> Radhakrishnan's vision for the unity between the East and West reaches its height when he drops his early insistence on the major differences between the two cultures and their implications for disunity. This is particularly true of his later writings that do not fall in the period being discussed here. He begins by raising the problem of defining the 'East' and 'West' since both have different subvarieties. This leads him to suggest that 'there is not much truth in the pseudo-science of national or continental psychology which affirms that all Easterners are this and all Westerners are that'. Like a mystic he concludes: 'there are no fundamental distinctions between the East and the West. Each one of us is both Eastern and Western'. Furthermore, 'they (East and West) are two possibilities which every man in every age carries within himself, two movements of the human spirit'. Finally, the conclusion reached is that

such classification as the West being rational and the East being intuitive, the one being reflective and the other meditative etc. must be dropped. How can we account for this movement of thought in Radhakrishnan? Is it because of the change in his understanding of the two cultures? Perhaps the answer lies in his persistent search for religious universalism. He recognizes that too much insistence on the differences between the East and West may act as a hindrance to their unity. Thus he proclaims that the differences between the two are not geographical or historical: rather they point to a tension of values that exist within each individual. How can this tension be resolved? Once again the need for a universal religion is emphasized.[38]

Sarvepalli Gopal, his son, refers to the 'psychological resistance in Western minds' to his formulation of universalism. Though some of it may have diminished, elements of it perhaps still persist. In other words, the fundamental context of Radhakrishnan's life, which involved a challenge to Christianity continues to be perceived as such, when it had perhaps faded as a factor in his own thinking. The antipodean role of Hinduism in this confrontation has also left its mark, in the sense that his version of universal religion has been regarded by some as 'really a form of Hinduism'.[39]

The universalizing leaven was at work in Radhakrishnan's thought from fairly early on. 'From the search for mutual understanding between followers of different religions and cultural traditions, he had, even in 1936, moved on to plead for the emergence of a new civilization based on the unity of mankind and common truths of the spirit'.[40]

It seems that, at first, Radhakrishnan was led by his search for religious universalism to the idea of the religion of the spirit. Ishwar C. Harris draws attention to the book by Auguste Sabatier entitled *The Religions of Authority and the Religions of the Spirit* (1904).[41] He wonders whether 'the two scholars ever met', for he detects a 'profound similarity'[42] in their thought. This similarity lies in their rejection of authoritarianism in religion. This 'struggle to liberate religion from orthodoxy in order that it may become more experiential is a powerful testimony of religious universalism. Their search is neither Eastern nor Western, neither Hindu nor Christian. It is radically universal'.[43] Not only at the level of religious authority did Radhakrishnan give primacy to experience,[44] at the level of religious ethics he noted that 'control over ego and desire is also very important in

order to be in touch with the Spirit'. Radhakrishnan sees this as a universalist position and often quotes from Buddha, Jesus, and Paul to suggest that these men spoke of such a control as a necessary prerequisite for a meaningful religious life.[45]

Similarly, at the level of religious myths and rituals, and other forms particular to a religion, Radhakrishnan was inclined to treat them as externals, in the sense that while at the 'temporal level, mind, body, and spirit present a trinitarian relationship',[46] at the transcendental level 'man's spirit supersedes his body and mind'[47] and thereby the externals of a religion which manifest themselves at the temporal level.

If one now turns to a consideration of the term religion itself one discovers that 'when Radhakrishnan uses the term religions (plural) he means organized religions, whereas the use of the term religion (singular) stands for a true and pure religion. This distinction is indicative of the fact that despite his belief that all religions are one, Radhakrishnan prefers the spiritual religion'.[48] I think the point to be noted is that, in the context of religious pluralism, the statement that all religions are one indicates a teleological unity, whereas in the context of the religion of the spirit it represents a numerical unity. Thus there is a definite movement in the thought of Radhakrishnan from the idea of religious universalism to the idea of universal religion. 'If the truth is one, then ultimately, there is only one religion. It is the eternal religion which Radhakrishnan identifies (as) *Sanātana Dharma*. According to this understanding, to him it is misleading to speak of different religions. We have different religious traditions which can be used for correction and enrichment'.[49] Ishwar C. Harris derives two other notions regarding religion from Radhakrishnan's belief in Sanātana Dharma. 'First, all religions are equally true as they are different expressions of the same spirit. Consequently, there should be no enmity or struggle among them. Second, essentially all religions [at] their core are one as they share the same oneness of spirit. This is yet another reason for amiable relations among religions. Ultimately it is Radhakrishnan's hope that humanity will cling to religion and let religions be'.[50]

At this point one needs to distinguish between the idea of one religion and that of universal religion. The idea of one religion implies either that a single religion (e.g. Islam, Christianity) converts the whole world to it *or* the whole world converts to one religion, whether it be a common denominator among all the religions or a new synthesized religion. The basic point is that multiplicity of religions

disappears. As against this, the idea of universal religion does not necessarily involve the dissolution of individual traditions, though it may require their accommodation. We can now see why Radhakrishnan develops two parallel concepts: (1) religion of the spirit; and (2) fellowship of the spirit. The religion of the spirit is transcendent as one, but is also immanent in the many religions, for there is in his thought a clear recognition of 'religious particularities',[51] of the religions as they now exist.

There is a certain dynamism in Radhakrishnan's treatment of religious universalism which makes it difficult to pin down his position on universal religion but I think we are now in a position to capture its contours. In one sense the religion of the spirit is already there underlying every religion; however, inasmuch as the different religions might tend to accentuate their differences, this must be pointed out to them and fellowship encouraged; this could lead to their unification. In other words points (1) and (2) which *now overlap may one day merge,* a consummation devoutly hoped for by Radhakrishnan. Then the second will flow from the first, rather than the first flowing into the second, as it were. The subterranean spring will flood the surface as well.

12

Universal Religion in Modern Hindu Thought: Some Conclusions

Several meanings of the term universal religion were identified in the first chapter. In this last chapter we discover that, notwithstanding its polysemic connotations, the term can also be employed with a measure of semantic economy. The foregoing survey of universal religion in the life and thought of several leading figures of modern Hinduism, enables one to identify two major senses in which the concept of universal religion has played itself out in modern Hinduism: either as the acceptance *by* all of one religion, or, as the acceptance *of* all the religions by one. Although both these senses of universal religions can be identified in modern Hinduism, and are sometimes even found incarnated in the same person, the latter sense – that '*of* acceptance of all the religions by one' by and large occupies the higher and larger ground over and above the sense of 'the acceptance *by* all of one religion'. The concept of universal religion in modern Hindu thought must therefore primarily be understood as conforming to this sense. A folksier way of stating the same conclusion would be to say that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the people of the world into two kinds and those who do not. Modern Hindus like to think that they belong to the type who don't.

But who are those modern Hindus? We have been speaking of the leading figures but what of the led? How far into the heartland of universalism have the modern Hindus followed their leaders? The evidence is circumstantial. It is legal as well as statistical in nature and not without interest.

The United India Assurance Company, a public sector undertaking in Madras, printed 5000 greeting cards in 1983 for distribution among its patrons on the occasion of the celebration of the Hindu festival of Diwali, otherwise known as the Festival of Lights. These greeting

cards had the *Gāyatrī Mantra* inscribed on them, with an English translation. As is well known, this *mantra* is said to contain the essence of the Vedas and it is through initiation with this *mantra* that one becomes a twice-born. It might also be added that, in classical Hinduism, the franchise of this *mantra* was restricted to the male members of the three higher *varṇas*.

That was the case in classical Hinduism. In terms of modern Hinduism the story unfolds as follows. An organization called the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) filed a writ petition against the distribution of such cards by a public sector undertaking, alleging that such an action on the part of a public sector organisation violated the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. It was also pejoratively argued that the *mantra* was a privilege of the Brāhmaṇas.

This petition was rejected in 1992. The high court judge, Mr Justice D. Raju, observed in his judgment that there is 'nothing on record to demonstrate that the *mantra* is the exclusive privilege or property of any class, caste or community'. He went even further and stated: 'It will be anachronistic for any one to contend that the *mantra* signifies or relates to any *particular religion*.'[1]

The root metaphor of universal religion thus seems to have moved beyond the closed circle of religious leaders and their followers to find a place in legal circles as well.

But what of the modern Hindu at large? It is hard to be dogmatic, even certain, in such matters but in a survey in post-Independent India 'Eighty per cent of those questioned replied that love of all mankind was the most important aspect of religion'.[2]

Modern Hindus thus identify the core value of religion itself as love, not only the most universal of emotions but also the most universalizable and universalizing emotion as well. Moreover, it is universalizable in both the senses of universal religion. Have the followers outdone the teachers? This is a consummation wished for by many a Sanskrit saying. Be that as it may, in the end in all boils down to something as simple or as complex, as easy or as difficult as that: a love for humanity.

Notes

1 UNIVERSAL RELIGION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1. Thomas Aykara, ed., *Meeting of Religions* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1978), p. 182; C.T.K. Chari, Editor-in-Chief, *Essays in Philosophy Presented to Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan on his Fiftieth Birthday* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1962), p. 515; Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 191–95; V.S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought* (New Delhi: Asian Publishing House, 1964), p. 91; as 'world faith' in S.J. Samartha, *Radhakrishnan: His Thought* (New York: Association Press, 1964), pp. 109–10; as 'world religion' in Robert Lawson Slater, *World Religion and World Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 209, etc.; as 'universal faith' in Nels Frederick Solomon Ferré, *The Universal Word: A Theology for a Universal Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969). To be sure one may distinguish between the words religion and faith (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* [New York: Mentor, 1964] passim) but in the present context the distinction does not appear to be significant.
2. See Fahrang Zabeeh, *Universals: A New Look at an Old Problem* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); Richard I. Aaron, *The Theory of Universals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Raja Ram David, *The Problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972); Frits Staal, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), etc.
3. For a succinct statement see Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (University of Calcutta, 1954), pp. 239–42.
4. Quoted by Clifford Geertz, see Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock, 1966), p. 1. Interestingly, in the same book, the selection from M.E. Spiro casts doubt on religion as a universal phenomenon (*ibid.*, pp. 87, 91).
5. See, for instance, Frederick Ferré, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), Chapter 3.
6. Surendra Varma, *Metaphysical Foundation of Mahatma Gandhi's Thought* (Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970), pp. 67–8; also see Chapter II and pp. 30–1.
7. Niharranjan Ray, ed., *Rammohun Roy: A Bi-Centenary Tribute* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1974), pp. 77–8, 179; Saumyendranath Tagore, *Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1966), pp. 13, 45–6.
8. No attempt will be made in this chapter to move in a Heideggerian direction on the question of essences, i.e. the possible 'abyss' mentioned in the passage below. 'What does 'in truth' mean? Truth is the essence of the true. What do we have in mind when speaking of essence?

Usually it is thought to be those features held in common by everything that is true. The essence is discovered in the generic and universal concept, which represents the one feature that holds indifferently for many things. This indifferent essence (essentially in the sense of essentia) is, however, only the inessential essence. What does the essential essence of something consist in? Presumably it lies in what the entity is in truth. The true essential nature of a thing is determined by way of its true being, by way of the truth of the given being. But we are now seeking not the truth of essential nature but the essential nature of truth. There thus appears a curious tangle. Is it only a curiosity or even merely the empty sophistry of a conceptual game, or is it – an abyss?' (Albert Homesteader, tr., Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], p. 50).

9. For such an interpretation see the following. 'The universal and the particular are, in all rational systems of thought, regarded only as two moments of one complete whole. The universal is nothing unless it articulates itself through some particular; on the other hand, the particular loses all movement, that is all life, when it divorces the universal. The universal can only take legitimate shape among a people through the national and traditional institutions of the people; that is the one (and) only method of realisation of universal ideals by a people.... This essential unity between humanity and nationality, between socialism and individualism, was the central truth of the system of Raja Rammohun Roy.' (Bipin Chandra Pal as cited in V.C. Joshi, ed., *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* [Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., 1975], p. 70).
10. See R.F.C. Hull, tr., Carl Gustav Jung *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).
11. See for example, Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
12. For instance, see the works of Károly Kerényi on archetypal images in Greek religion.
13. Joseph D. Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1969), pp. 199–204.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
15. J.J. Altizer, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973).
16. Joseph D. Bettis, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
17. Tamaru Noriyoshi, 'Some Reflections on Contemporary Theories of Religion', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. II, No. 2–3. (June–September 1975) pp. 83–101.
18. Melford E. Spiro in Michael Banton, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 89–90.
19. F. Max Müller, *Chips From a German Workshop*, Vol. IV. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), p. 253.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
23. See Richard Eddy, *History of Universalism* (New York: The American Church History Series, Vol. X, 1894).

24. Ernest Cassara, ed., *Universalism in America: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 21–2.
25. Robert Baird, *Religion in the United States of America* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), p. 640.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 634.
27. One should recognize here that the term universal as applied to the Christian Church can have a very distinct sense of its own, see Robert T. Handry, ed., *Religion in the American Experience: The Pluralistic Style* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 240.
28. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
31. William Ernest Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper, 1956).
32. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
34. *Ibid.*, p.226.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
36. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana Ltd, 1971), p. 11. To that extent they may be regarded as the *same* rather than *equal*, if we are prepared to follow Martin Heidegger when he draws the following distinction between the two: 'It is, however, important to take note here of an essential point. A short parenthetical remark is needed. Poetry and thinking meet each other in one and the *same* only when, and only as long as, they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature. The *same* never coincides with the *equal*, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say "the same" if we think difference. It is in the carrying out and settling of differences that the gathering nature of sameness comes to light. The same banishes all zeal always to level what is different into the equal or identical. The same gathers what is distinct into an original being-at-one. The equal, on the contrary, disperses them into the dull unity of mere uniformity' (*op. cit.*, pp. 218–19).

2 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF RAMMOHUN ROY (1772/4–1833)

1. Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 19, 20.
2. Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *The Hindu Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 278.

3. V.S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1978), pp. 27–8.
4. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *The Father of Modern India: Commemoration Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations, 1933* (Calcutta: Rammohun Roy Centenary Committee, 1935) Part II, p. 15. For a survey of his writings on religion see Ajit Kumar Ray, *The Religious Ideals of Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1976).
5. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds, Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samāj, 1962) pp. 496–7.
6. Quoted in Satis Chandra Chakravarti, *op cit.*, Part II, p. 91.
7. *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 105.
8. Quoted in U.N. Ball, *Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Ray, 1933) pp. 12–13. U.N. Ball thinks Roy was fourteen at the time (*ibid.*, p. 13).
9. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 497.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
11. Quoted in U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 19. V.S. Naravane already sees the seed of the idea of a universal religion germinating here (*op. cit.*, p. 28) but Sir Brajendra Nath Seal is of the opinion that he was still far from reaching the universalistic position one finds in his 'prefaces to the Vedanta abridgement and translations'. (Satis Chandra Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 101).
12. Quoted in U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
14. Quoted in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
15. U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
16. See Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 22; U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 59, etc.
17. U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
18. Quoted in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–4.
19. U.N. Ball, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–12.
20. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 103.
21. See Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–3: 'I hope it will not be presumed, that I intend to establish the preference of my faith over that of other men. The result of controversy on such a subject, however multiplied, must be ever unsatisfactory. For the reasoning faculty which leads men to certainty in things within its reach produces no effect on questions beyond its comprehension. I do not more than assert that if correct reasoning and the dictates of common sense induce the belief of a wise, uncreated Being who is the supporter and ruler of the boundless universe, we should also consider him, the most powerful and supreme existence, – far surpassing our powers of comprehension or description. And although men of uncultivated minds and even some learned individuals (but in this one point blinded by prejudice) readily chose as the object of their adoration any thing which they can always see and which they pretend to feed, the absurdity of such conduct is not, thereby, in the least degree diminished.' Also see *ibid.*, p. 28 'It is unjust in the Christian to quarrel with Hindoos because (he says) they cannot comprehend the sublime mystery of his

religion, the doctrine of the Trinity; since he is equally unable to comprehend the sublime mysteries of ours, and since both these mysteries equally transcend the human understanding, one cannot be preferred to the other.' Also see Jamna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1972) Chapter 3.

22. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds, *op. cit.*, pp. 469–70.
23. See V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–8 wherein while discussing the issues he makes three statements which may be similar but are not the same: (a) that Roy was contemplating a universal religion; (b) that Roy was asserting the idea of 'the fundamental unity of all religions' and (c) that, Roy, according to Shiv Nath Shastri propounded 'the doctrine (that) the one true God is the universal element in all religions and as such forms an article of faith of the universal religion of mankind. But the practical applications of that universal religion are to be always local and national'.
24. See Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds., *op. cit.*, Appendix X, p. 505.
25. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 105.
26. See Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds, *op. cit.*, pp. 505–6.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
28. Actually Roy once said as much. 'Just before he had set out for Europe, the Rajah told his friends that on his death each sect, the Christian, the Hindu, and the Mohammedan, would respectively claim him to be of their persuasion; but he expressly declared that the belonged to none of them. His prediction has been fully realized. No sooner did he depart this life, than the subject of his religious opinions became an apple of discord.' (Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 167).
29. See Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 21; Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 284–8.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
31. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds, *op. cit.*, p. 361. See *Bhagavadgītā* VIII.13.
32. See R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 806–9.
33. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 169.
34. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds, *op. cit.*, p. 369.
35. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 105.
36. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds., *op. cit.*, *passim*. Roy continued to regard himself as a Hindu, some would say a 'proud Hindu'. See V.C. Joshi, ed., *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1975), pp. 87–8; Niharranjan Ray, ed., *Rammohun Roy: A Bi-Centenary Tribute* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1974), p. 85; Hiren Mukherjee, *Indian Renaissance and Raja Rammohun Roy* (University of Poona, 1975), p. 20.
37. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–8. Hiren Mukherjee's references to his concept of a 'rapproachment of all religions' instead of 'universal

religion' is significant (*op. cit.*, p. 21). He called himself 'a follower of the Universal Religion', not its founder (Saumyendranath Tagore, *Raja Rammohun Roy* [New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1966], p. 45). Also see Sri Krishna Kriplani, *Rammohun Roy and Modern India* (Bangalore: Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, 1976), p. 11.

38. *ibid.*, p. 28. Also see Sisir Kumar Das, *Rammohun: His Religious Thought* in Niharranjan Ray, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 83.
39. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 273–4. For the full text of his tract see *Selected Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1977), pp. 281–6. The text consists of two parts: (1) a statement of the universal aspect of religion according to Roy, cast in the dialogical mode and (2) scriptural quotations cited in proof of the statements made.
40. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, ed., *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 101, emphasis added. See Saumyendranath Tagore, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–8.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
45. *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 103.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Satis Chandra Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 168.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–9.
50. Pandit Sivanath Sastri, *The Mission of the Brahmo Samāj* (Calcutta: Brahmo Mission Press, 1910), pp. 1–2. But it should be remembered that 'he never intended the idea to constitute an ideal faith of a new religion which would do away with the evils of all sectarianism' (Ajit Kumar Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 64).
51. Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World*, Vol. II (New York: Frederick A. Praegar, 1968), p. 311, emphasis added.
52. Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 280. This should not be taken to imply that the movement did not exert a salutary influence on Hinduism (*ibid.*).
53. R.C. Majumdar, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 872–5. For a fuller account see Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samāj* (Calcutta: R. Chatterjee, 1919). For an even more detailed account see Prosanto Kumar Sen, *Biography of a New Faith* (Calcutta: Thackner, Spink & Co., 1933).
54. Frithjof Schuon, *Language of the Self* (Madras: Ganesh, 1959), p. 1. I am indebted to Harry Oldmeadow for this reference.

3 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF DEBENDRANATH TAGORE (1817–1905)

1. Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1974 [first published Vol. I., 1911; Vol. II, 1912]) Chapter II.

2. Narayan Chaudhuri, *Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi 1973) pp. 69, 72.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
4. Piyush Kanti Das, *Raja Rammohun Roy and Brahmoism* (Kakdvip, 24 Parganas: Sundarban Mahavidyalaya, 1970) p. 106.
5. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *The Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1916) pp. 54–6.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1. Narayan Chaudhuri recounts the experience thus (*op. cit*, p. 13): 'When he was a lad of fourteen he one night looked at the star-studded sky and was wondering in his mind at the uniqueness of creation. Suddenly a feeling struck him that "this endless sky and this endless universe could not be the handiwork of a finite being". The feeling persisted in his mind and was the beginning of his abjuring of the worship of the finite gods and goddesses as represented by images including the "Shalagramshila"'.
7. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 38. Narayan Chaudhuri seems to give his age erroneously as 21 at the time (*op. cit.*, p. 13). Debendranath Tagore goes on to say (*ibid.*, pp. 39–40): 'Up to this time I had been plunged in a life of luxury and pleasure. I had never sought after spiritual truths. What was religion? What was God? I knew nothing, had learnt nothing. My mind could scarcely contain the unworldly joy, so simple and natural, which I experienced at the burning-ghat. Language is weak in every way: how can I make others understand the joy I felt? It was a spontaneous delight, to which nobody can attain by argument or logic. God Himself seeks for the opportunity of pouring it out. He had vouchsafed it unto me in the fulness of time. Who says there is no God? This is proof enough of His existence. I was not prepared for it; whence then did I receive this joy? With this sense of joy and renunciation, I returned home at midnight. That night I could not sleep. It was this blissful state of mind that kept me awake. Throughout the night my heart was suffused with a moonlight radiance of joy. At daybreak I went again to the river-side to see Didima. She was then drawing her last breaths. They had carried her into the water of the Ganges, and were fervently crying aloud, "*Ganga Narayan Brahma*". Didima breathed her last. I drew near and saw that her hand was placed on her breast, with the fourth finger pointing upwards. Turning her finger round and round, and crying "Haribol", she passed into the next world. When I saw this it seemed to me that at the time of death she pointed out to me with uplifted finger, "That is God, and the Hereafter". As Didima had been my friend in this life, so was she the guide to the next.'
11. Debendranath's autobiographical account runs as follows (Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, pp. 56–9): 'Whenever I come across idolatrous preachings in any *shastra* I no longer felt any reverence for it. An erroneous impression was then created in my mind that all our *shastras* were full of idolatry, and that it was therefore impossible to extract from them truths pertaining to the formless and changeless

Deity. When I was in this depressed state of mind, one day all of a sudden I saw a page from some Sanskrit book flutter past me. Out of curiosity I picked it up, but found I could understand nothing of what was written on it. I said to Shyamacharan Bhattacharya, who was sitting by me, "I will come home soon, after attending to the business of the Union Bank. In the meantime do you decipher the meaning of the verses on this page, so that you can explain it all to me on my return from office". Saying this I hurried off to the Bank. At that time I had a post in the Union Bank. My youngest uncle, Ramanath Tagore, was the cashier, and I his assistant. I had to stay there from 10 o'clock until the day's work was over. It took us up to 10 o'clock at night to make up the accounts. But on that day, as I was to have the page out of the Sanskrit book explained to me by Shyamacharan Bhattacharya, I could not brook the delay of balancing accounts; so with my uncle's permission I came home early. I hurried up to the *boythakkhana* on the third story, and asked Shyamacharan Bhattacharya to explain to me what was written on the printed page. He said, "I have been trying hard all this time, but cannot make out its meaning." This astonished me. English scholars can understand every book in the English language; why then cannot Sanskrit scholars understand every Sanskrit book? "Who can make it out then?" I asked. He said, "This is what the Brāhma Sabha talks about. Ramchandra Vidyāvagish of the Sabha could probably explain it." "Then call him", said I. Soon afterwards Vidyāvagish came to me. On reading the page he said, "Why, this is the *Isopanishat*."

When I learnt the explanation of "*Isāvāsyamidam sarvam*" from Vidyāvagish, nectar from paradise streamed down upon me. I had been eager to receive a sympathetic response from men; now a divine voice had descended from heaven to respond in my heart of hearts, and my longing was satisfied. I wanted to see God everywhere, and what did I find in the Upanishads? I found, "If the whole world could be encompassed by God, where would impurity be? Then all would be pure, the world would be full of sweetness." I got just what I wanted. I had never heard my most intimate thoughts expressed like this anywhere else. Could men give any such deep significance of "*Isāvāsyamidam sarvam*". Oh! what words were those that struck my ears! "*Tena tyaktena bhunjitha*". "Enjoy that which He has given unto thee." What is it that He has given? He has given Himself. Enjoy that untold treasure; leave everything else and enjoy that supreme treasure. Cleave unto Him alone and give up all else. Blessed beyond measure is he who cleaves unto Him alone. This tells me that which I have long desired.

The keenness of my sorrow lay in this, that I was dead to all happiness, earthly and divine; I could take no delight in the things of this world, I could feel no joy in God.

But when the divine voice declared that I should renounce all desire of worldly pleasure and take my delight in God alone, I obtained what I had wished for, and was utterly flooded with joy. It was not the dictum of my own poor intellect, it was the word of God Himself. Glory be to that Rishi in those heart this truth was first revealed! My faith in God took deep root; in lieu of worldly pleasure I tasted divine joy. Oh! what

a blessed day was that for me – a day of heavenly happiness! Every word of the Upanishads tended to enlighten my mind. With their help I daily advanced along my appointed path. All the deepest significances began to be revealed to me. One by one I read with Vidyāvagish the *Isa, Kena, Katha, Mundaka,* and *Mandukya* Upanishads, and the remaining six with other pundits.'

The influence of the verse on his father is confirmed by the testimony of his son Rabindranath Tagore: 'Subsequently, Rabindranath also in his various speeches and addresses on his father referred to this one single sloka repeatedly to emphasize that this was the key-note of his father's transformation to a life of renunciation from one of worldly pursuits. He said: "The rishi who had uttered his sloka hundreds and hundreds of years ago did not know that this utterance of his in a very distant future would in the form of a torn leaf carry the tidings of eternal wealth, to a son of a rich man inured to the ways of luxury in a capital city of the British. What astonishing power these words of the forgotten forest-dwelling seer, clad in tree-bark, conveyed, piercing through the maze of enchanting youth and riches."' (Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 18).

12. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 4.
13. Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–5.
14. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 5.
15. Piyus Kanti Das, *op. cit.*, p. 110. D.S. Sarma thinks that this was a serious mistake (*Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* [Benares Hindu University, 1944] p. 94ff); others hold different views.
16. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 167.
17. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought* (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1978) p. 31. For details see Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, Chapter XXIII.
18. Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
19. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 16.
20. *Ibid.* (Diacritics supplied.)
21. Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
23. *Ibid.*, Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 17.
24. Ishwar C. Harris, *Radhakrishnan: The Profile of a Universalist* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates [Publications] Pvt. Ltd., 1982) pp. 33, 44–5.
25. David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samāj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 191: 'But Debendranath had chosen his life's work, and there was no way his father could alter that decision. What Debendranath did alter repeatedly was his commitment to nationalism, which he periodically disavowed for universalism. In the 1840s, he defended Vedanta as the book of reformed Hinduism; but in 1950, under Akkhoy Kumar Dutt's influence, he rejected not only Vedanta but the book of any national religion as a revealed source. In 1859, he supported Kushub Sen's liberal theism and universalism; but in 1865, as we have seen, he took a hard line against the Kushubites as a nationalist. In 1881, commenting from the

Himalayas in a letter on Kushub's New Dispensation, Debendranath wrote that "Kushub inspired with a love catholic and extraordinary, he prepared himself to bring about a reconciliation between the monotheists of India with those of Arabia and Palestine. This is a difficult undertaking. The disputes and discussions which this has produced have no end.... That clamor has even reached me here in my solitary mountain retreat.... If only that desire of wisdom in him could have been satisfied by what our own Rishis have taught."'

26. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
27. David Kopf., *op. cit.*, p. 193.
28. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 13.
29. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
30. Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
31. Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
32. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. 15.
33. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
34. *Ibid.* Also see Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 39, 58.
35. D.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 100; etc.
36. J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967: first Indian edition) p. 45.
37. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 32; D.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 100, etc.
38. J.N. Farquhar, *op. cit*, pp. 44–5.
39. Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
40. Piyus Kanti Das, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
41. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–4. But also see Piyus Kanti Das, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
42. Piyus Kanti Das, *op. cit.*, p. 115. It should be noted that when one makes sacred authority reside in the heart one really universalizes it. And this is what Debendranath accomplished (Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–1: 'Debendranath showed the originality as well as the courage of his mind by declaring openly that thenceforward neither the Vedas nor the Upanishads would be the base of the Brahmo Dharma. Where then could the base lie? He emphatically said that *the pure heart of a devotee secure in self-reliance and enlightened by knowledge* ("atmapratyaysiddha jnanojjwalita visuddha hriday") was this base. "It is in the pure heart that the Brahma resides. It is the pure heart that is the basis of Brahmo Dharma. We can accept only those words of the Upanishads which are in consonance with the spirit of that heart. We cannot accept those words which run counter to it." (The Autobiography, Chapter 22).'
43. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, Chapter XXXII.
44. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
45. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
46. *Ibid.*, p. xix
47. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.
48. *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.
49. *Ibid.*, p. xxxix. For a brief account of these see Narayan Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 28ff.

50. Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, trs., *op. cit.*, p. ix.
51. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

4 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF KESHUB CHUNDER SEN (1838–84)

1. Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1974 [first published 1911(I) and 1912(II)]), p. 72 ff.
2. J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967 [fist published 1914]), pp. 58–68.
3. Nanda Mookerjee, ed., *Keshub Chunder Sen* (by) F. Max Müller (Calcutta: S. Gupta & Brothers, 1976), p. 26.
4. See Meredith Borthwick, *Keshub Chunder Sen* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1977), Contents.
5. David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern India Mind* (New Jersey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 268.
6. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 15, note 26; Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 252. Herein the text is said to consist of 'Autobiographical sermons' but David Kopf remarks (*op. cit.*, p. 280): 'Posterity was obviously on the mind of Keshub in 1882 because, while recuperating in the Himalayan hill station of Darjeeling, he began dictating his autobiography to Protap Majumdar. The title of his spiritual odyssey was *Jiban Veda*, which has considerable symbolic meaning to Koar, who believed that this was Keshub's final testimony to his belief in the Vedantic ethic. The unity of the Spirit made all men brothers under the Fatherhood of God. The meaning of Keshub's title, according to Koar, was that "everyone's life is a Veda written in the blood of all mankind"'.
8. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.
9. Max Müller notes that 'In 1856 he was married to a very young girl, the marriage being celebrated with usual pomp. He himself disapproved of all extravagance, and he tells us how his thoughts at the time began to turn into a new direction. "I entered the world", he says, "with ascetic ideas, and my honeymoon was spent amid austerities in the house of the lord"' (*op. cit.*, p. 4). Meredith Borthwick gives considerable psychological consideration to his marriage and writes (*op. cit.*, p. 11): '1856 was also the year of Keshub's marriage. His bride was a nine or ten year old village girl, Jaganmohini Devi. Keshub deeply resented the marriage, which naturally had been arranged for him, and avoided his wife for many years'. His marriage coincided with a state of deep depression, a major crisis period in his life which he recalled vividly in the Jeevan Veda. His depression seems to have been compounded of many elements. It was difficult for him, when all absorbed in devotion to God and the examination of his own soul, to face an intimate sexual relationship. He associated religiosity with asceticism, probably because of examples within the Indian tradition rather than Christianity, and

therefore felt that wife and family were a distraction from the true pursuit of spirituality and the intensity of religious experience. He was at this time of a puritanical nature – Protap also noted that he gave up playing cards, and threw away his violin. There is also the possibility that he had imbibed an abhorrence of the Hindu custom of child marriage form his missionary friends, and from the social reformist sector of the Bengali intelligentsia represented by Vidvasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutt.

As I dreaded lust and anger, so did I consider wife, children and the world to be dangerous. Lest I loved these more than God, lest I regarded the world to be dearer – this fear made the world look like a terrible demon.

His fears indicate an awareness of the strong passions within himself. The conviction that these had to be restrained caused great tension.'

10. Meredith Borthwick sums up this and allied developments from around the age of 14 thus (*op. cit.*, pp. 8–9): 'Around this time his religious spirit began to develop more fully. Keshub did not mention exactly when he became dissatisfied with Hinduism, but said that under the influence of a liberal English education his belief in idolatry died a natural death. When he said in his Jeevan Veda that the first word of the scripture of his life was prayer, he was not referring to the formal prayers which would have accompanied the traditional Hindu rituals. He said that the impulse to pray came to him before he was a member of any religious community and before he had come into the company of any pious men – but he heard a voice in his heart saying, "Pray, thou shalt be saved; thy character shall improve...." This is most unusual in that it describes a type of religion alien to the Hindu tradition. Prayer which is morally elevating and not merely an expression of devotion, which is helpful to the supplicant, who prays for specific things, and which drives away sin – seems to be much more akin to a Christian concept. This being so different from a traditional Hindu or Vaishnava concept, it is possible that Keshub, in retrospect, tended to remember his spiritual awakening as a more spontaneous process than it actually was, and it may in fact have followed after his association with Christian missionaries. Another possible explanation is that Keshub's experience may not have been very much outside the familiar tradition, but his phraseology in recapturing the experience was obviously very much influenced by Christian concepts and terms. He did not show much interest in Hinduism. He never learnt Sanskrit, and his knowledge of the Hindu scriptures was very much inferior to his extremely thorough knowledge of, and ability to quote from, the Bible. He said that English education had unsettled his mind and left a void. To resolve his doubts, and to satisfy his burgeoning religious feelings, he turned away from his own religion to which was so much a part of the novelty of English education, Christianity. He studied philosophy and theology, and discussed these new subjects with his missionary friends'.

11. See D.S. Sarma, *Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Benara Hindu University, 1944), p. 96. Also see J.N. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–1.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
13. In effect Keshub declared 'that the Renunciation of caste was as essential to Brahmaism as the Renunciation of idolatry' (R.C. Majumdar, ed., *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* Part II (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), p. 103.
14. Quoted in D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–2.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
16. David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 264. See G.C. Banerji, *Keshab Chandra and Ramakrishna* (Allahabad, 1931); etc.
17. David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 265; Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–157; D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–4.
18. J.N. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–8; David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
19. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 104. *op. cit.*, p. 266.
20. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 271.
22. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
23. See Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 255. He cites the text of the proclamation which ran as follows (*ibid.*, pp. 255–7): 'Keshub Chunder Sen, a servant of God, called to be an Apostle of the Church of the New Dispensation which is in the holy city of Calcutta, the metropolis of Aryavarta,

    To all the great nations in the world and to the chief religious sects in the East and the West,

    To the followers of Moses, of Jesus, of Buddha, of Confucius, of Zoroaster, of Mahomet, of Nanak and to the various branches of the Hindu Church,

    To the saints and the sages, the Bishops and the elders, the ministers and the missionaries of all these religious bodies,

    Grace be unto you and peace everlasting.

    Whereas sectarian discord and strife, schisms and enmities prevail in our Father's family, causing much bitterness and unhappiness, impurity and unrighteousness, and even war, carnage and bloodshed;

    Whereas this setting up brother against brother and sister against sister in the name of religion has proved a fruitful source of evils and itself a sin against God and man;

    It has pleased the holy God to send unto the world a message of peace and love, of harmony and reconciliation.

    This New Dispensation hath He in boundless mercy vouchsafed to us in the East and we have been commanded to bear witness unto it among the nations of the earth.

    Thus saith the Lord:

    Sectarianism is an abomination unto me and unbrotherliness I will not tolerate.

I desire love and unity, and my children shall be of one heart even as I am one.

At sundry times have I spoken through my prophets and though many and various are my dispensations there is unity in them.

But the followers of these my prophets have quarreled and fought and they hate and exclude each other.

The unity of heaven's messages have they denied, and the signs that bind and harmonise them their eyes see not and their hearts ignore.

Hear ye men, there is one music, but many instruments, one body but many limbs, one spirit but diverse gifts, one blood yet many nations, one church yet many churches.

Blessed are the peace makers, who reconcile differences and establish peace, good will and brotherhood in the name of the Father.

These words hath the Lord our God spoken unto us, and His new Gospel; He hath revealed unto us, a Gospel of exceeding joy. The Church Universal hath He already planted in this land, and therein are all prophets and all scriptures harmonised in beautiful synthesis.

And these blessed tidings the loving Father hath charged me and my brother Apostles to declare unto all the nations of the world, that being of one blood, they may also be of one faith and rejoice in the one Lord.

Thus shall all discord be over, saith the Lord, and peach shall reign on earth.

Humbly therefore I exhort you, brethren, to accept this new message of Universal love.

Hate not, but love ye one another, and be ye one in spirit and in truth even as the Father is one.

All errors and impurities ye shall eschew, in whatever church or nation they may be found, but ye shall hate no scripture, no prophet, no church.

Renounce all manner of superstition and error, infidelity and scepticism, vice and sensuality, and be ye pure and perfect.

Every saint, every prophet and every martyr, ye shall honour and love as a man of God.

Gather ye the wisdom of the East and the West, and accept and assimilate the examples of the saints of all ages.

So that the most fervent devotion, the deepest communion, the most self denying asceticism, the warmest philanthropy, the strictest justice and veracity and the highest purity of the best men in the world may be yours.

Above all, love one another and merge all differences in universal brotherhood.

Beloved brethren, accept our love and give us yours, and let the East and the West with one heart celebrate the jubilee of the New Dispensation.

Let Asia, Europe, Africa, and America with diverse instruments praise the New Dispensation, and sing the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man.'

Sastri adds: 'This proclamation called forth criticism from many quarters. Some foreign papers found in it words of deep wisdom; some were charmed by its broad catholicity; whilst not a few viewed it as the product of an abnormally excited brain.'

24. Nanda Mookerjee, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 26. David Kopf's remarks are not without interest here (*op. cit.*, p. 270): 'In 1880, Keshub seemed to envision himself less a religious prophet in the traditional sense and more a Newton of religious science. This was the academic side of his New Dispensation. Probably few scholars in the world knew as much as Keshub about the major religions of the world. And from *Keshub's point of view, he was in a better position to reason clearly about religion than even Max Müller because he, Keshub, was free of the biases of the true believer in a "revealed religion"*'. (italics added)
25. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
26. Nanda Mookerjee, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29, emphasis added.
27. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
28. See Sivanath Sastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–6.
29. David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
30. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
31. David Kopf, *op. cit.*, p. 283.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–3.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
35. Nanda Mookerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 30, etc.

5 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF RĀMAKṚṢṆA PARAMAHAṀSA (1836–86)

1. On the analogy of universal language, etc. 'Adopted (intended to be) used, understood, etc., everywhere or by all nations.' *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p. 242.
2. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass: G & C. Merriam Company, 1959) p. 2501.
3. Swami Nityatmananda, *'M' – The Apostle and the Evangelist* (Rohtak, India: Sri Ramakrishna – Sri Ma Prakashan, 1967) p. 210.
4. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965) p. 192.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition) (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) Vol. IV, p. 179.
6. Cited by D.S. Sarma, *Hinduism Through the Ages* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956) p. 140.
7. Narasingha P. Sil, *Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa: A Psychological Profile* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991) p. 162.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master* (tr. Swami Jagadananda) (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952).
9. Nalini Devdas, *Sri Ramakrishna* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1966); Claude Alan Stark, *God of All: Sri Ramakrishna's Approach to Religious Plurality* (Cape Cod, Mass: Claude Stark, Inc., 1974); Arvind Sharma, *Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1989), etc.
10. Cited in Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Harper: SanFrancisco, 1991) p. 74.
11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (tr. Swami Nikhilananda) (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952) p. 111.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 559.
13. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
14. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 12.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 558–9.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 559.
17. F. Max Müller *Rāmakṛṣṇa: His Life and Sayings* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1923).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
19. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 486.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Quoted by Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989) pp. 275–6.
23. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.
25. Nalini Devdas, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–6.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
27. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 559, emphasis added.
28. Nalini Devdas, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–5.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 148. Also see p. 103.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 708–9.
35. Cited in Wm Theodore de Bary, *et al*, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) Vol. II, p. 93.
36. Nalini Devdas, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
37. See Claude Alan Stark, *op. cit.*, p. 38, note 2.
38. R.R. Diwakar, *Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964) p. 205.

39. *Ibid.*
40. Walter G. Neevel, Jr. 'The Transformation of Śri Rāmakrishna' in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) p. 96.

6 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF SWAMI VIVEKĀNANDA (1863–1902)

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekānanda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition: Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968) Volume VI, p. 181.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 403.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 411.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 361.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 365.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 365–6.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 366.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 376.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 376–9.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
33. Vol. I, p. 24.
34. Vol. III, p. 267.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*

39. Vol. II, p. 379, emphasis added.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 380–1.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Vol. III, p. 472.
45. Vol. III., p. 103.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
48. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 250, emphasis added.
52. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 13, etc.
53. *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 122.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5, 139.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
68. Vol. III, p. 314.
69. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 227, emphasis added.
70. *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 231.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 279, emphasis added.
75. Vol. II, p. 373.
76. Vol. II, pp. 382–3.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 366, etc.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 383–4, emphasis added.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 385–6.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
87. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 320.

88. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 493.
89. Ishwar C. Harris perhaps overstates this point when he writes (*op. cit.*, p. 65): 'Vivekananda's views on a universal religion are ambiguous. Sometimes he claims that a universal religion already exists, and sometimes he finds it in the making to be fully realized in the future. Sometimes he gives up the idea of a universal religion altogether and yet proceeds to outline the important elements of the said religion. More than once he identifies Vedānta as the universal religion if there were to be a universal religion at all.'
90. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 414.
91. *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 523.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
93. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972) pp. 228–9.
94. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. III, p. 348.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 348–9.
96. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 411. He, however, contradicts himself elsewhere, see Vol. VI, p. 480.
97. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 411–12.
98. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 412, emphasis added. In his teachings to the masses, if the teachings as found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* may be so considered, he actually at times downplayed Advaita. He had been initiated into Advaitic *sādhanā* by Totā Purī (alias Naṅgṭā) of whom he had this to say in the *Gospel* (p. 779): 'Once I fell into the clutches of a Jñāni, who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang of Her, Nangtā would, weep and say, "Ah! What is this?" You see he was such a great Jñāni and still he wept.'
99. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 349.

7 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF SVĀMĪ DAYĀNANDA SARASVATĪ (1824–83)

1. Hugh Tinker, *South Asia: A History* (second edition) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990; first published 1966) p. 168.
2. Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1977) p. 467; Josephine Random, compiler, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938) p. 121.
3. Swami Nikhilananda, tr., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942) p. 42. What Rāmakṛṣṇa exactly made of Dayānanda is not clear. He does refer to having met him but the general tenor of the discussion is slightly negative (*ibid.*, p. 607). This meeting of Dayānanda with Rāmakṛṣṇa is not mentioned in the otherwise commendable biography of Dayānanda by J.T.F. Jordens.

4. Hugh Tinker, *India and Pakistan* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962) pp. 18, 20; Philip H. Ashby, *Modern Trends in Hinduism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) p. 34; Percival Spear, *India: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1972) pp. 293–4. He concludes by describing the Ārya Samāj as 'archaic' (p. 294). The same work erroneously describes Dayānanda instead of Vivekānanda as being present at the World Conference of Religions at Chicago. Elsewhere he presents what appears to be a more balanced account (Percival Spear, ed., *The Oxford History of India* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1958] pp. 726, 751).
5. Mark D. Lawrey, *Ecumenism: Striving for Unity Amid Diversity* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985) *passim*.
6. R. Panikkar, 'Editorial', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19:4 (1982).
7. Peter Staples, 'Towards an Explanation of Ecumenism', *Modern Theology* 5:23–44 (Oct. 1988).
8. Harold Coward, 'The Response of the Ārya Samāj', in *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) pp. 39–50.
9. G. Walter Neevel (Jr), 'The Transformation of Śrī Rāmakrishna', in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) p. 96.
10. J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 270.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 205–6.
13. Kenneth W. Jones, 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Ārya Samāj Contribution', *Journal of Asian Studies* XXVIII:1:146 (Nov. 1968).
14. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
15. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Government of India: Publications Division, 1969) p. 474; also see M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma* (ed. Bharatan Kumarappa. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958).
16. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 167; K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *Swami Dayananda Sarasvati: A Study of His Life and Work* (Delhi: Manohar, 1987) p. 117.
17. R.P. Pathak, *Teachings of Swami Dayananda (Talks and Sermons)* (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Institute, 1973) p. 32.
18. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 268.
19. *Ibid.*, Chapter X.
20. See Har Bilas Sarada, ed., *Dayanand Commemoration Volume* (Ajmer, 1933) p. xxxiii.
21. Dayananda Sarasvati, *Satyārthaprakāśaḥ* (Ajmer: Vaidika Yantralaya, 1966) p. 257 ff.
22. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *Modern Hindu Thought* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978) p. 52.
23. J.F. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism Through Śuddhi* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1977) *passim*.
24. Glyn Richards, 'Modern Hinduism', in Friedhelm Hardy, ed., *The Religions of Asia* (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 175.

25. D. Mackenzie Brown, 'The Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak: *Karma* vs *Jnana* in the *Gita Rahasya*', *The Journal of Asian Studies* XVII:2:182 (Feb. 1958). The fact that Dayānanda chose the Saṁhitā portion of the Vedas rather than the Bhagavadgītā as his basic scripture is somewhat puzzling, as the Gītā is quite consistent with most of his ideas on image worship, the caste system based on *karma*, etc. In any case the Gītā would have required a far less violent exegesis to obtain the desired results compared to the Vedas. Perhaps its status as a *smṛti* came in the way.
26. J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: Macmillan 1914) pp. 111–12. Strictly speaking *Niyoga* is 'The Temporary Union of Widows and Widowers' (Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 117 ff; P.V. Kane, *History of Darmaśāstra* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1974) Vol. II, Pt. I, Chapter XII.
27. Norman G. Barrier, 'The Ārya Samāj and Congress Politics in the Punjab', *The Journal of Asian Studies* XXVI:3:363 (May, 1967).
28. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 17; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (1969)*, p. 588; Nirmal Minz, *Mahatma Gandhi and Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1970) pp. 38–47.
29. Rammohun Roy, *The English Works of Rammohun Roy with an English Translation of 'Tuhfatul Muwahiddin'* (New York: AMS Press, 1978) p. xxv.
30. R.C. Majumdar, ed., *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965) Part II, p. 127.
31. Perhaps because he took some cheap shots at other religions; for instance, he asks: If the sun was not created on the first day, how could three days pass *before* it was created (*op. cit.*, p. 448). But even Mahatma Gandhi (*Hindu Dharma*, p. 166), not to mention Rammohun Roy (*op. cit.*, p. 166) were not above taking such digs.
32. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1959) Vol. V, pp. 233–5.
33. K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
34. J.N. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, 119.
35. Wm Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of the Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) p. 634. This was removed from the second edition of the *Sātyārha Prakāśa* (see J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 265).
36. *Ibid.*, Chapter IV.
37. Dayānanda Sarasvatī, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 168, 209, 226.
38. Agehananda Bharati, 'The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns', *The Journal of Asian Studies* XXIX:2:274 (Feb. 1970).
39. Swami Nikhilananda, tr., *op. cit.*, pp. 44–5; Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth* (New York: Norton and Company, 1969) *passim*.
40. Kenneth W. Hones, *op. cit.*, pp. 170–1.
41. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 204; R.P. Pathak, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–4.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 81
44. K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
47. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–6, 204.
48. Vishwanath S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 51; also see Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed., *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956) Vol. IV, p. 635.
49. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
50. K.C. Yadav, ed., *Autobiography of Dayananda Sarasvati* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978) p. 80, emphasis added.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90, emphasis added. The exact words used by Dayānanda for the part of the text emphasized are *sab ko aikyamat men kar*. The use of the word *mata* for religion is not common but nevertheless correct. Not only does Dayānanda consistently employ it himself in the sense of religion, it is also otherwise so employed (see T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* [Bombay: Chetana, 1971] p. 15; etc.).
52. Dayānanda Sarasvatī, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–7, 289–98, 368, 561–7.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–71. Jordens excludes Śūdras 'in a properly structured society' but adds in a footnote: 'This does not refer to the Shūdras of the time, because the society has not yet been properly structured'. It should be noted that this was only Dayānanda's preliminary position. The final position as found in the final edition of the Sātyārtha Prakāśa clearly allows access to the Vedas to one and all' (*ibid.*, pp. 68–71; J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 262).
54. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
55. Shri Durga Prasad, *Light of Truth: An English Translation of Satyārthaprakāśaḥ* (New Delhi: Jan Gyan Prakashan, 1970, (1st edition 1908) p. 197.
56. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
57. Dayānanda Sarasvatī, *op. cit.*, p. 567.
58. *Ibid.*, Part I, Chapter 10.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 251, my translation.
60. Ronald M. Green, 'Morality and Religion'. In Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Vol. 10, p. 99.
61. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
62. Percival Spear, ed., *op. cit.*, J.N. Farquhar, *op. cit.*,; R.C. Majumdar, ed., *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1991: 3rd edition) Part II, p. 110; etc.
63. J.T.F. Jordens, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 243–4.
65. W.M. Theodore de Bary, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 628.
66. K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12; Prem Lata, *Swami Dayānanda Sarasvatī* (New Delhi: Summit Publications, 1990) pp. 173–178; etc.
67. K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 1599.
68. Prem Lata, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 175. Also see K.S. Arya and P.D. Shastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–3; D.N. Vasudeva, *Swami Dayananda Sarasvati* (New Delhi: Dayanand Sansthan, 1973) p. 78; etc.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–6.

8 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861–1941)

1. Cited in V.S. Naravane, *Modern Hindu Thought: A Philosophical Survey* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967) p. 116.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
3. Cited, *ibid.*, p. 124.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
6. D.S. Sarma, *Hinduism Through the Ages* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956) p. 168.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
8. Cited in V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
10. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Louis Renou, *The Nature of Hinduism* (trans. Patrick Evans. New York: Walker and Company, 1951) p. 143. See Rabindranath Tagore on *gāyatrī*, as cited in D.S. Sarma (*op. cit.*, p. 188): 'By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man, we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit whose power creates the earth, the sky and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world.'
14. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
15. M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949) p. 40.
16. Cited in D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
17. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
18. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
19. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–2.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–9.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 176–7.
25. Cited in D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
26. Louis Renou, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
27. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 188–9.
28. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931) p. 16.
29. *Ibid.*, also see p. 60.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 29. 'The reality of a piece of iron is not provable if we take the evidence of the atom; the only proof is that I see it as a piece of iron, and that it has certain reactions upon my consciousness.' (*ibid.*, pp. 48–9); '...the physiology of our beloved is not our beloved' (*ibid.*, p. 114); 'A lotus has in common with a piece of rotten flesh the elements of carbon and hydrogen. In a state of dissolution there is no difference between them; but in a state of creation the difference is immense; and it is that difference which really matters.' (*ibid.*, p. 124).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Appearance does not possess a negative connotation for Tagore: 'When we deprive truth of its appearance it loses the best part of its reality. For appearance is a personal relationship; it is for me' (V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 135).
41. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 19.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3. Tagore elaborates the point as follows (*ibid.*, pp. 103–4). 'There is an illustration that I have made use of in which I supposed that a stranger from some other planet has paid a visit to our earth and happens to hear the sound of a human voice on the gramophone. All that is obvious to him and most seemingly active, is the revolving disc. He is unable to discover the personal truth that lies behind, and so might accept the impersonal scientific fact of the disc as final – the fact that could be touched and measured. He would wonder how it could be possible for a machine to speak to the soul. Then, if in pursuing the mystery, he should suddenly come to the heart of the music through a meeting with the composer, he would at once understand the meaning of that music as a personal communication.

    That which merely gives us information can be explained in terms of measurement, but that which gives us joy cannot be explained by the facts of a mere grouping of atoms and molecules. Somewhere in the arrangement of this world there seems to be a great concern about giving us delight, which shows that, in the universe, over and above the meaning of matter and forces, there is a message conveyed through the magic touch of personality. This touch cannot be analysed, it can only be felt. We cannot prove it any more than the man from the other planet could prove to be satisfaction of his fellows the personality which remained invisible, but which, through the machinery, spoke direct to the heart.'
43. *Ibid.*, p. 124, emphasis added.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
45. Cited in V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
46. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*., p. 90.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–5.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 96, emphasis added.
50. *Ibid.*, Chapter IV.
51. *Ibid.*, Chapter VII. Also see Appendix I.
52. *Ibid.*, Chapter V.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 154–5.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
55. *Ibid.*, Chapter IX.
56. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
57. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, pp. 23, 57, etc.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
59. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
60. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 108, emphasis added.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.
64. Hal W. French and Arvind Sharma, *Religious Ferment in Modern India* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981), p. 133.

9 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF MAHATMA GANDHI (1868–1948)

1. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1964) Vol. XII, p. 94.
2. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1950) p. 6.
3. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana Limited, 1971) p. 227.
4. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 232.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
7. *Gandhi's Autobiography* (tr. Mahadev Desai) (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1948) p. 56.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–14; Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969) pp. 79–86.
9. *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 171.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
11. Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1983) p. 114.
12. As cited in Krishna Kriplani, ed., *All Men are Brothers* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960) p. 79.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
17. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, pp. 237–8.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 232.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
20. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, pp. 234–5.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

24. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
26. Krishna Kulkarni, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 78–9.
27. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 232.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 251–2.
29. Margaret Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
32. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, pp. 59–60.
33. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978) p. 73.
34. Krishna Kriplani, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 89.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
37. Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) pp. 8–11.

10 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF ŚRĪ AUROBINDO (1872–1950)

1. A.B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1926)* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1960).
2. D.S. Sarma, *Hinduism Through the Ages* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956) pp. 211–12.
3. G. Hanumantha Rao, 'What is Hinduism', in N. Sivarama Sastry and G. Hanumantha Rao, eds, *Prof. M. Hiriyanna Commemoration Volume* (Mysore: Prof. M. Hiriyanna Commemoration Volume Committee, 1952) p. 28.
4. See Nirmal Chandra Sinha, 'Failure of Imperialism as a Method of World Unity', in *All India Conference on the Relevance of Sri Aurobindo Today* (Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Samiti, 1975) pp. 72–9.
5. Stephen N. Hay in Wm. Theodore de Bary ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) p. 726.
6. A.B. Purani, *op cit.*, p. 146.
7. Fragment cited in T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana, 1971) p. 232, emphasis added.
8. Robert A. McDermott, ed., *The Essential Aurobindo* (New York: Schochen Books, 1973) p. 26 note 3.
9. Troy Wilson Organ, *Hinduism: Its Historical Development* (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Seriens, Inc., 1974) p. 361.
10. In this respect his statement on India's independence represents a position he had reached much earlier. Part of it reads:

    The Fifteenth of August 1947

    August 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the

comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to the India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity, – though these too she must not neglect, – and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for other entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. (A.B. Purani, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–2).

11. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 218. The idea of *svadharma* ultimately points to the principle of Diversity in Unity: 'Underlying this diversity is the principle that each individual and each group has to grow according to its own *swadharma* and nature. Therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo "the unity of human race is to be entirely sound and in consonance with the deepest laws of life must be founded on free groupings, and the groupings again must be the natural association of free individuals"' (Ramnath Sharma, *The Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* [Delhi: Vineet Publications, 1980] p. 120).

12. Robert A. McDermott, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
13. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
14. Hal W. French and Arvind Sharma, *Religious Ferment in Modern India* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981) pp. 141–3.
15. Robert A. McDermott, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 6. Also see S.K. Maitra, *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1968) *passim*.
16. V.S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought: A Philosophical Survey* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967) pp. 227 note 2: 'Aurobindo is the only significant thinker in modern India who remained completely impervious to the impact of Islam. From his voluminous writings on Indian culture it would appear that a thousand years of Islam in India simply made no difference at all'.
17. See Robert A. McDermott, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 37–9; Glyn Richards, ed., *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* (London: Curzon Press, 1985) pp. 172–8; T.M.P. Mahadevan, *op. cit.*, pp. 233–9; D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 220–30; V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, pp. 212–27, etc. for progressively elaborate accounts of Sri Aurobindo's system, apart from The Life Divine itself, and his other works (Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, 30 vols. [Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970–1976]).
18. Sri Aurobindo devotes more attention to the concept of a world-state than to that of universal religion, see Sanat K. Banerji, *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Man* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1974) Part Three.
19. R.C. Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Jan Fays, *The Philosophy of Evolution in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973); Ursula King, *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin & Eastern Religions* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981) pp. 185–6; etc.
20. D.S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
21. Cited, *ibid.*, p. 213.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
23. Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition* (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1971) p. 137.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
25. V.S. Naravane, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
26. Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *The Hindu Tradition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) pp. 328–9.

11 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF S. RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975)

1. Ishwar C. Harris, *Radhakrishnan: The Profile of a Universalist* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates [Publications] Pvt. Ltd. 1982).
2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
4. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, '"The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need" (Fragments of a Confession)' in Paul Arther Schlipp, ed., *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1952) p. 9.
5. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5, emphasis added.
9. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
10. Sarvepalli Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
11. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
12. Sarvepalli Gopal, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
18. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Some of the works published by Radhakrishnan during this period are: *The Idealist View of Life* (1932), *East and West in Religion* (1933); *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939), etc.
24. Sarvepalli Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
25. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
26. Sarvepalli Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
27. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
30. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, pp. 40–1; also see pp. 28, 29; Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–3.
31. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) p. 313.
32. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, pp. 326–7. This passage is strongly reminiscent of the following remarks by Emile Durkheim: 'In reality, then, there are no religions which are false. All are true in their own fashion; all answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence. It is undeniably possible to arrange them in a hierarchy. Some can be called superior to others, in the sense that they call into play higher mental functions, that they are richer in ideas and sentiments, that they contain more concepts with fewer sensations and images, and that their arrangement is wiser. But howsoever real this greater complexity and this higher ideality may be, they are not sufficient to place the corresponding religions in different classes. All are religions equally, just as

all living beings are equally alive, from the most humble plastids up to man. "So when we turn to primitive religions it is not with the idea of depreciating religion in general, for these religions are no less respectable than the others. They respond to the same needs, they play the same role, they depend upon the same causes; they can also well serve to show the nature of the religious life, and consequently to resolve the problem which we wish to study".' (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [tr. Joseph Ward Swain [London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1925] p. 3).

33. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
34. The books published during this phase of his career include *The Bhagavadgītā* (1948), *The Dhammapada* (1950), *The Principal Upaniṣads* (ed. 1953); *Recovery of Faith* (1955); *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy* (ed., 1957); *The Bramasūtra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life* (1960); *Fellowship of the Spirit* (1961), etc.
35. S. Radhakrishnan, tr., *The Brahma Sūtra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960) p. 249.
36. Sarvepalli Gopala, *op. cit.*, p. 362.
37. Professor V.S. Naravane points out that 'one of the distinctive features of Radhakrishnan's work on religion' was 'his patient, well-reasoned advocacy of universalism'. He goes on to say: 'If I might strike a personal note, during two of my own conversations with Radhakrishnan I could see the intensity of his conviction that if Religion has to play a creative role in the world of today and tomorrow it must adopt the universalist standpoint. In one of his books he showed so much distress at the prejudices and dogmatism of conventional religions that he concluded: "Religions must go if Religion is to live." I asked him whether this was not an extreme position. He said: "Perhaps it is. But it is necessary to emphasize that Religion will cease to be a positive force in human affairs unless it sheds its parochialism and moves, however cautiously, towards the ideal of a universal faith." On this question Radhakrishnan felt closer to Tagore than to Mahatma Gandhi, who always asserted that he was an "orthodox Hindu", though he considered all religions to be basically true.' (Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. viii).
38. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–4.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 184. This is questioned by Ishwar C. Harris.
40. Sarvepalli Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 368.
41. Ishwar C. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

12 UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN MODERN HINDU THOUGHT: SOME CONCLUSIONS

1. 'Gāyatrī Mantra not against Secularism', *The Times of India*, (New Delhi) August 31, 1992, p. 4, emphasis added.
2. J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India* (New York: The Free Press, 1968) p. 65 note 3.

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